TRUANT HAPPINESS

MADAME ALBANESI

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Truant Happiness

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By

E. MARIA ALBANESI

Author of "Susannah and One Other," "Love and Louisa," "The Sunlit Hills," "Poppies in the Corn," etc., etc.

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To
MRS. FRED TERRY
(Julia Neilson)

"The beauty of a lovely woman is
like music." —*George Eliot.*

TRUANT HAPPINESS

CHAPTER I

ANGELA found the invitation from Peniston Court lying on the table in the hall when she arrived home a trifle fatigued after her day of work.

She took up the letter and looked at it with curiosity, turning it over and over in her hand, sniffing the fragrance which emanated from it, and puzzling herself as to who could possibly have written to her on such delightful notepaper. Then she went to the door at the top of the kitchen stairs and asked if she might have some bread and butter.

"Having escaped with my life from the bus. Oh! how I hate them these days! I need refreshment, Ellen. Don't bother about tea," she added. "I know it's too late."

"I can easily put the kettle on, Miss Angela," the maid answered, who ran up the stairs. "It won't take me a minute."

Angela paused, hesitated, and then said—

"Well, I think I will have a cup of tea. Who's in and who's out, Ellen?"

"Miss Maud's in the drawing-room with Captain Rayburn and another gentleman in khaki. They came a long time ago, and I haven't heard them go, so I suppose they are there still. Mrs. Fayne rang up and said she'd be late, miss, but Mr. Fayne, he came in somewhere about four-thirty, and he went straight upstairs to lie down."

"Did he seem very tired, Ellen?" There was a little note of anxiety in Angela's voice.

"Not more than usual, miss; he said he'd rest till dinner-time."

"Oh! that's good."

Angela turned away, and then turned back.

"Oh! I say, Ellen, I've got another parcel here for you, which will keep you busy downstairs for a few days! The workrooms want these things back by the end of the week. They are mosquito-nets, to be sent out to our men in Mesopotamia. There's a pattern one inside for you to copy."

She threw the parcel to the maid, and then shut the door and went into the dining-room, a well-worn apartment, yet having a cosy touch about it, with a little air of elegance. The furniture was old-fashioned, but of an interesting period, and the pictures on the walls were few but good.

Angela tossed off her soft felt hat, let all her little belongings drop on the floor beside her, and then fell to scrutinizing once again the letter which she had found.

It certainly was meant for her—for the name was there in full.

"Miss Angela Fayne."

"Well, perhaps if I open it I shall know what's inside," she said to herself.

A little thrill of excitement passed through her, and her eyes lit up as she read the contents.

Lady Bettina Storrington's letter asked a favour of Miss Angela Fayne. It seemed that she was arranging two entertainments for a number of wounded soldiers who were scattered about in her neighbourhood, and she would be so grateful if Miss Fayne would kindly consent to help her.

"My cousin, Miss Theo Masson, who is working with you as an orderly, tells me that you have a most charming voice, and that she is quite sure you will not be annoyed with me for asking so big a favour. If you can come, please let me know by return, and I shall be delighted if you will stay here from the Thursday for a week."

Whilst Lady Bettina had been writing this letter, she had remarked to her daughter—

"I hope to goodness this girl can sing! Theo Masson is not a particularly good judge of music, still one does

get at one's last gasp trying to find people for these entertainments, so I must risk it."

"Perhaps," observed Miss Storrington, "it would have been as well to have heard her before giving her an invitation to come here. Who is she?"

"Her name is Fayne," said Lady Bettina. "It's a good name, and according to Theo she is a very nice and a very attractive girl."

"Couldn't you ask her for one concert only? and then she could come and go in the day."

"My dear," said Lady Bettina, with a worried look. "One has to make little concessions. You can't expect the girl to come all this way from town to give her services for charity and not have some attention shown her. Of course I must put her up."

Perhaps the thrilling excitement and the delicious sense of pleasure which this flattering invitation suggested, and which animated Angela so completely, might have been modified had she heard this little interchange of views; as it was, she accepted the note on its face value and was honestly delighted to receive it.

She glanced at the clock, and gave a little sigh as she did so. It was tiresome that this should be one of her mother's late afternoons. Now there would be no possibility of talking things over with that beloved and sympathetic person for the moment, consequently Angela poured out her heart to Ellen, who arrived at that moment with the tea-tray and a few home-made cakes.

"Isn't it thrilling!" she declared. "The only bother is that I've got nothing decent to wear, but I shan't worry! Mother's so wonderful. She always manages to make things come right in some mysterious way." Then Angela paused. "Listen! Aren't they coming downstairs?"

The maid turned and went quickly out of the room.

As she poured herself out some tea, Angela could hear her sister taking farewell of her guests in the hall outside, and she made a grimace to herself. Then she stuck up Lady Bettina's letter on the mantelpiece, so that Maud should see it the moment she came into the room and

when she heard the front door close she called to her sister, "I'm in here. Come and talk to me."

The eldest Miss Fayne entered, looking pleased and humming to herself under her breath.

She was handsome in a coldly regular way—a fact of which she was perfectly well aware.

As Angela waved her hand to her she paused.

"There is plenty of tea upstairs," she said. "I wish you wouldn't be so thoughtless, Angela. What is the use of mother preaching economy if this sort of thing goes on?"

"I hate cold tea and pieces left over. Don't rag me for the moment. Maud, sit down and talk. I haven't seen you since nine o'clock this morning, and, oh, my dear, it has been such a day! I verily believe I carried down about thirty bales from the packing-room. Just look at me. Aren't I a sight?"

But Miss Fayne was not looking at her sister; she was staring at the letter on the mantelpiece.

Angela waved her teaspoon.

"That, my dear," she said, "is an 'invitation for me! Read it and tell me if you don't think its the most wonderful thing that has ever happened?"

It was evident from Maud's expression that wonder was not the emotion which filled her.

"But how can you possibly go to stay at a strange house with people whom you've never met and whom you know nothing at all about? I call it rather impertinent!" She flicked the letter away from her on to the table, and then she added loftily, "Lady Bettina only wants to make use of you, Angela, and you never told me that you were so thick with Miss Masson."

"Oh, I don't know that I'm thick with anybody in particular!" Angela said a little hotly. "We pull together very well, that's all. Theo is a real good sort and a ripping worker. She doesn't care literally *what* she does as long as we get the stuff through."

"Well, of course, it's no business of mine, but I should certainly not accept an invitation like that!"

Angela swallowed the rest of her tea with a little gulp of disappointment, and the brightness faded out of her face.

"Oh, well," she said, "of course I shan't do anything till I have talked it over with mother!"

"It will mean so much expense!" observed Maud, and in an abstracted sort of way she picked up one of the little home-made buns and ate it. "To stay in a house of this kind one must have good clothes."

"If it comes to that I can take out some of my war savings and get what I want!" Angela answered in an exasperated manner. "You needn't be afraid; I shan't ask father. Poor lamb! He's got quite enough to do as it is. Ellen says he has come in dreadfully tired. I do wish he could chuck being a special constable for a little while."

And then Angela changed the conversation.

"Well? And what did Rex Rayburn have to say for himself? He's home again very soon from the Front, isn't he? Why he had leave only a couple of months ago!"

"He's here now on some special mission. Of course I didn't ask him anything about it."

"Of course not!" said Angela. She paused an instant, and then she asked, "Did he say anything about Honor?"

Maud Fayne coloured sharply as she answered—

"No. Why should he ask for Honor? You can't expect him to be very much interested in her now, can you?"

"I don't know how anybody could help being interested in Honor!"

With a shrug of her shoulders Maud turned and walked out of the room; and Angela laughed softly to herself.

Then she fell to studying Lady Bettina's letter once again and to planning how she could best arrange her limited wardrobe. After a little while she dismissed the matter with a shrug of her shoulders. "As I'm only wanted to sing, I don't suppose it matters what I wear!"

The telephone bell rang at that moment, and she ran

along the passage to answer it, giving an exclamation of pleasure as she heard the voice of her married sister.

"Hallo, darling!" she said. "Yes, it's me—I—Angela." She listened a moment and then said: "Do you want me to come now? Why, of course I will! No, I'm not very tired. I'll leave a message for mother. She isn't in yet. This is her heaviest day, you know. Oh, that will be all right! I'll leave a message with Ellen. And, Honor, don't put Christopher to bed till I come!"

Calling down the kitchen stairs once again, Angela gave instructions to the maid.

"Be an angel and take my things upstairs, will you, Ellen? And then please tell Mrs. Fayne when she comes in that I've gone to the studio. Tell her Mrs. Bellares rang up and said she wanted to see me. I don't expect that I shall be back for supper. I'm sure to have something to eat with Mrs. Bellares!"

CHAPTER II

FEELING glad that Maud had gone upstairs, and she had therefore escaped question and captious remarks, Angela passed out into the dusk once again. It would have been very nice to have hailed the "taxi" that was passing and have been conveyed in comfort to Chelsea; but this was an extravagance beyond her, so she journeyed by bus.

Her sister Honor had been married in the spring of 1914—it had been such a pretty wedding!—and had been widowed in the autumn of that year. Christopher Bellares had been one of the first to go out to France, and to lay down his life for his country.

Angela loved her sister Honor. From her earliest remembrance they had been so sympathetic to one another. There was, too, a great resemblance between them.

The bus deposited her at last at the corner of the street at which she had to alight, and she ran along the embankment till she came to the tall block of studios facing the river where her sister worked and lived.

Mrs. Bellares was waiting for the girl; the sound of the bell had brought her to the top of the stairs, and the sisters kissed one another lovingly.

"It's sweet of you to come, Angela, though I feel its rather mean of me to bring you here after your long day as orderly, but I am so anxious for you to see my new portrait, and it has to go away in the morning to be framed."

Angela untwisted her squirrel stole and sank on to a big sofa.

"I'm not very tired. Oh! well, not so tired as I am sometimes, and I'm frightfully pleased to come; you know that. Oh, Honor, how delicious it is in here! Isn't there some new arrangement for lighting? I'll get

up in a minute and look at the portrait; now I must sit still and look at you. Have you the least idea what a duck you look in that painting overall?"

Her sister laughed faintly.

"I want all your compliments for my work."

"Is it the portrait you were doing last week?"

Mrs. Bellares shook her head.

"No. I had to put that on one side. I got this offer quite unexpectedly, and as it was a very good chance I felt I must not lose it. I've been painting by electric light. My sitter was here three hours this afternoon."

"Three hours! Poor lamb! Honor, you mustn't overdo it. Although you look like a dream, you are getting thinner and thinner. In a little while you will fade out of sight altogether if you are not careful." Then Angela sprang to her feet, and began talking eagerly about the picture. "Where shall I stand? Is this a good place?"

"No; come over here," said Mrs. Bellares; a little eagerness passed into her expression. She was, as Angela had said, most attractive to look upon and astonishingly youthful in her pale green painting gown. Her hair, of a warm brown almost auburn shade, was cut short, and hung straight about her face.

Angela's hair was auburn too, but considerably brighter; and it was of a different nature. It curled naturally, and was never very tidy.

"I'll keep my eyes shut," she declared, "till you tell me to open them."

"This is my first attempt at a portrait done in artificial light," Honor Bellares said, "so of course I am awfully anxious. I felt you might see this before I send it away. I value your opinion; you seem to spot the good and the bad at a glance."

"And yet I don't know anything about it, do I? Well, I'm ready, Honor!"

As she stood with her eyes closed the girl drew in several deep breaths.

"You've got some violets somewhere, I'm sure."

"They're on the table just behind you. They came here this afternoon. I don't know who sent them. There was no card, so I can't write and thank the giver."

Angela's heart gave a little leap.

"But how thrilling!" she declared. "See what it is to be a successful young artist! Nobody sends me violets."

"Well, it's rather tiresome," said Mrs. Bellares, "because one doesn't like to be ungracious. Now, Angela, you can open your eyes."

The girl obeyed her sister slowly, then she gave a little gasp.

"Oh, Honor," she said, "what a splendid portrait! And what a lovely girl! Who is she?" Without pausing to have her question answered, she went on hurriedly, "She looks as if she were actually coming out of the canvas. You're simply marvellous the way you make your people live!"

"Then you like it?" asked Mrs. Bellares. "But please criticize it, Angela."

Before answering the younger sister walked a little nearer to the painting.

"Did I say she was lovely? Well, I change my mind. 'Lovely' is too sweet, too tender a word to apply to her. She is quite beautiful, but in a hard, cold, rather bitter way."

"That's been my great difficulty," said Mrs. Bellares. "I've never been in sympathy with her once during the sittings; but I tried so hard to keep that out of the painting."

"There's nothing wrong with your work," said Angela; "but, oh, what a cat she must be! Who is she?"

"She's a girl called Patricia Lessingham, and apparently very well known. I am sure I don't know why she came to me, except that I suppose she must have liked the pastel I did of Mrs. Tankerville and her daughter. That pastel has brought me quite a lot of commissions. It was Mr. Callard, my friend at the little gallery near here, who advised me what to ask and

all the rest of it ; but Miss Lessingham's father seemed to find my price quite reasonable, and she herself has expressed herself as being very satisfied with the portrait."

"She would be very hard to please if she weren't," observed Angela.

"I am sending it to that new portrait exhibition which opens next week, as Miss Lessingham is very keen that I should exhibit it. I confess I'm pleased with it myself, but I felt nervous and wanted another opinion ; that's why I dragged you over here to-night, you poor child ! "

"I only wish I could be here more often ; but you're so busy, and I am too." Then Angela added, "But there's a possibility of my having a little holiday. I feel quite excited."

As she told her sister about Lady Bettina Storrington's invitation Mrs. Bellares gave a little exclamation of surprise.

"How very odd ! Patricia Lessingham is going down to stay at Peniston Court, she told me so this morning. She seems to be an intimate friend of the Storringtons."

They discussed the portrait for some while longer, and Angela ventured to make one or two suggestions ; then Mrs. Bellares led the way from the studio to the bedroom at the back, and Angela was allowed to bend over her little nephew sleeping in his cot and to press a kiss on his flaxen curls.

A few minutes later they were summoned by the nurse, who helped her mistress in many little ways, to a supper which was daintily served, and the two sisters discussed the arrangements for the visit to Peniston Court.

"I hope you will go. I am sure mother will decide that you must accept this invitation."

"Oh ! I know that. Darling heart, she always wants me to have nice things and enjoy myself, but Maud isn't one little bit pleased ! She pulled an awful face when I gave her Lady Bettina's letter to read. Honor, dear ! Maud *is* a trial ! "

"She hasn't been to see me for ages," Mrs. Bellares

said. "I had an idea from what mother said that she'd taken up some work at the War Office."

"She did make a start in the beginning of the year, but then she got a cold, or a pain in her temper, and she threw it up. So now we have the joy of her society all the time!"

The bowl of violets sent by some one unknown was standing on the supper table, and Angela bent over it, inhaling the sweetness of the flowers.

"These were never bought in a London shop," she declared.

Mrs. Bellares agreed.

"No; they are much too fresh and large. When I shut my eyes and—smell their fragrance, Angela, I go back—and I remember—all I am trying to forget."

Angela just glanced at her sister and then glanced away. She had quickly guessed the identity of the anonymous giver.

"No wonder he did not speak of her to Maud," she said to herself.

"You must have some of the violets, Angela," her sister said when the girl rose to take her departure, "and nurse must go to the corner of the street and put you in the bus. Oh! yes, I know you are very independent, but the streets are so dark these times that I shall feel happier if I know that nurse has started you on your way. And oh! I want you to take those two books over for father, will you, darling? And here is the photograph of Chris that I promised mother. See, I'll wrap them up in this piece of paper."

Angela embraced her sister, clinging to her closely before they separated.

"It was lovely of you to send for me, darling," she said; "it is a great honour to be consulted by you, and I know you are going to have a tremendous success with this picture. It ought to make a sensation! Good night, darling—good night. Promise me to go to bed. You have worked too much already to-day."

Jolting homeward in the omnibus, though she was tired, Angela was not sleepy. It was a clear, yet a moonless

night, and the sky was every now and then streaked with long rays of silver as the searchlights moved across the wide expanse of the heavens.

It both awed and amused the girl to watch the evolutions of those immense rays, and to follow the hide-and-seek methods of the small luminous clouds which tipped them, and every now and then got loose and darted across the sky in a seemingly irresponsible manner. Nothing brought home to Angela the significance of the change wrought by the war more surely than the indifference with which this nightly illumination of the sky was regarded. In pre-war time what a sensation would have been caused by these broad beams of silver light moving across the wide darkness of the starlit night! How quickly crowds would have gathered to witness this curious manifestation! How excited people would have been! But now the searchlights played to a cold audience; they were part of an abnormal condition of affairs which existing circumstances had imposed. Would life ever slip back to the customs, habits, manners and social routine of the days when war had been a word in the dictionary and very rarely used or thought about?

The question was one which pressed on every heart, but for which there was no ready answer.

Her mother was waiting for her when Angela arrived home. Mrs. Fayne looked very like Honor, though her dark hair was powdered with grey and her eyes were tired and her face thin. But there was the same sweet expression about the mouth and the same beauty in the eyes.

"Father has gone to bed. He left you a kiss, darling. He seemed thoroughly tired out to-night," she told the girl, "and Maud went upstairs to write letters."

"And you sat up for me? You love!" exclaimed Angela as she cuddled her mother. "Has anything been worrying you, darling?" she asked the next moment.

Mrs. Fayne denied this, but confessed she had a headache.

"But it isn't much, and now you've come it will go very quickly. You know I always get nervous on the

days when I have to go through the workroom books. I'm so horribly afraid I shall have made no end of mistakes; but father glanced through them just now, and he says that everything is quite in order, so I am happy again!"

"I think Maud might do the books for you. What *does* she do with herself all day? She is quite well now. It's time she went back to her war work."

But Mrs. Fayne carefully avoided discussing this subject.

There was a decided lack of sympathy between this eldest daughter and herself, arising largely from the fact that Maud had been in a sense adopted by one of her father's sisters, a rich woman who had never quite approved of her brother's wife, but had taken an interest in his eldest child because she traced a resemblance in the little girl to herself.

This Mrs. Crosbye had sent her niece abroad for finishing touches to her education, and had then launched her into society. Unfortunately for Maud, her aunt had been widowed suddenly; and therefore all her gay doings had come to a premature end.

Moreover, she had been forced to return to take her place once again in her home circle, and perhaps only her mother realized how bitter her disappointment was, and how much her vanity had suffered from the fact that her sister Honor should have found a husband and should have been married at the very time when she, Maud, might possibly have made a brilliant marriage, and thus have separated herself definitely from her family, with whom she was completely out of sympathy. In fact, the effort to fit in as best she could in the modest little establishment over which her mother reigned was not very successful; and at times life was strained and uncomfortable. Mrs. Fayne found that she had all her work cut out to preserve the same charming atmosphere, the same sympathetic understanding which had characterized the life of her home circle before her eldest daughter's return, but she never confessed this, and most loyally tried to defend Maud when others condemned.

Angela understood thoroughly well now why her mother made no reply to her last speech, and she took the hint.

They sat some little while discussing Lady Bettina Storrington's invitation, and finally went upstairs arm in arm.

At her mother's door they parted with a few whispered words and soft kisses.

When she was at last alone in her little bedroom Angela hunched herself up on her bed, and sat there musing. Thought of the coming visit excited her and drove sleep away. She had given her mother the photograph of little Chris, but she had carried the two books up with her, intending to give them to her father in the morning; and as she sniffed at the violets which her sister had pinned on her blouse she opened one of those books and scanned it half idly.

It was a volume of poems and essays by an artist friend of Mrs. Bellares; and as Angela glanced through the pages, promising herself to read them more leisurely later on, a piece of paper fluttered out from between the leaves and fell on the quilt of her bed.

The girl picked up this piece of paper, thinking possibly it might be one of the poems in MS.; the author of this book, she knew, was in the habit of submitting his writings to her sister before publishing them.

She read half-way down the page, and then she suddenly crumpled the paper in her hands.

The words she had read were no fictional ones, nor did they deal with an imaginary subject; they were part of a letter written from a man somewhere in France, and it was signed with the initial "D." Angela felt herself trembling, as if she had been guilty of a wrong to the writer of this letter, inasmuch as she, a stranger, had inadvertently become acquainted with that which was so intimate.

As Angela opened the book she held to replace this thin sheet of paper within its pages she recognized it as the one Miss Lessingham was holding in her hand in her portrait, and she guessed immediately that the letter belonged to Mrs. Bellares' sitter, who must have slipped this portion of it into the book and then forgotten it.

Angela got off the bed and put aside the book, but her hands were still trembling. Though it was of course a matter entirely outside herself, yet she seemed to be conscious of something approaching a personal connection with this matter. At least there was a vital touch in the sympathy she gave so unreservedly to this unknown writer, whilst to one so young as she and with the elusive glory of romance still undimmed, the mere fact that such a letter had been left indifferently in the pages of a book to be read by any chance or curious person argued an indifference which amounted to cruelty itself.

Angela felt convinced as she at last got into bed that she emphatically disliked Miss Patricia Lessingham, and with perhaps an unreasonable amount of vehemence she found herself hoping that she might never be brought in contact with her.

CHAPTER III

A LETTER from Mrs. Bellares reached Angela by the first post the next morning.

"Nurse and I went through my wardrobe after you had gone last night, Angela darling, and I am afraid there is not very much that will be of use to you now except a white *crêpe de Chine* evening-gown, which would require very little alteration, so I am sending it on, and also the enclosed cheque, and you simply must use this money, for I know just how you feel about asking father. It will be extremely foolish of you not to accept this invitation; you will probably meet interesting people, and, I hope, enjoy yourself thoroughly. Anyhow, dear little sister, don't deny me the real pleasure of being a little help to you just now. You see, I can afford it quite easily, and it makes me so happy to be able to do this."

Angela read this letter in bed. Her room was one which Honor had occupied before her marriage.

There was a mist over the girl's eyes as she glanced about the familiar walls, on which were hung many of her sister's early sketches and studies. Then she slipped out of bed and made her way to her mother's room.

Mrs. Fayne was reading her favourite newspaper, and looked up apologetically as Angela came in.

"I'm just going to get up," she said. But Angela jumped on to the bed and hugged her.

"Why should you get up, you darling thing? And why shouldn't you read your paper when and where you want to? You are mistress in this house, aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose I am," said Mrs. Fayne; but she spoke a little dubiously; then hurriedly she asked—

"Have you had nice letters this morning?"

"I have had two from the Front, but I haven't opened them yet. This is from Honor. Do read what she says, mummie! Isn't she a darling? All the same I hate taking this money."

There was a little flush on Mrs. Fayne's cheek as she glanced at the cheque.

"I have just been talking to your father about this invitation," she said, "and he agrees with me that it would be a great pity if you did not go. I am afraid Honor will be much hurt if you don't use this money."

"Ten pounds is such a lot," said Angela, as she cuddled her knees and planted her chin on top of them. "But of course there's the journey down, and I shall have to tip the servants; and I must have some shoes and stockings; and I am afraid I ought to have a new dressing-gown. No, I'm *not* going to take your best pink one, Mrs. Fayne! You've been keeping that for your own special use, and I won't wear it!"

Mrs. Fayne laughed.

"But this is a joint stock establishment!" she said. "We must all share with one another; and there are other things you must buy. Fortunately, I need not go to the canteen till after lunch to-day, so I shall be able to go into all these things with you."

Angela gave her a kiss.

"Let's both take a morning off. I can ring up Theo and she'll arrange things for me. Only"—the girl's face became downcast—"what about Maud?"

"I believe she is going to the country this morning to stay till to-morrow with the Byngs."

Angela clapped her hands.

"Oh! how rippin'. What a piece of luck! Now we can be happy. How I wish she'd stay away for a month!"

Then Angela took her mother's hand and, bending over it, kissed it fondly. "All right, darling," she said; "I won't say anything more, but you know we are so jolly by ourselves. Wouldn't it be joyful if Maud got married!"

A little colour crept into Mrs. Fayne's cheeks.

"Angela, I wonder——" she began, and then she

paused. "I sometimes think," she said when she spoke again, "that Captain Rayburn——"

But Angela shook her head resolutely.

"No, mummie dear," she said, "there's nothing in that. Captain Rayburn doesn't come here to see Maud, or me, or even you, you darling lamb! He comes just to have a chance of speaking about Honor."

"Angela!" exclaimed Mrs. Fayne. "My dear!"

"Oh, I know what I'm talking about. He simply adores Honor, and she, of course, never even remembers he is in existence except when she sees him," said Angela. Then she sprang to her feet. "There goes the first gong. I shall be ever so late. Now, sweetheart, promise me that you won't move. I'll bring up your breakfast-tray."

Mrs. Fayne was struggling into a sitting position.

"If I—if I get up at once," she said, "I shan't be so very late."

But Angela pushed her back on the pillows.

"Go on reading your papers," she said, "and don't attempt to move."

"But if I don't get up I shall be so late, and I want to go shopping with you, Angela."'

"Oh, bother me!" exclaimed the girl. "You do as you're told. I'll come in to you on my way down."

Angela got through her dressing with marvellous rapidity and was down in the dining-room before her sister appeared. As she kissed her father and hugged him she said—

"I am going to carry mother's breakfast upstairs. Please stand by me, daddy."

"I'll carry it up," said Mr. Fayne.

But Angela pushed him back into his chair.

"No, you will do nothing of the sort! You have quite enough to do with your four hours' standing and walking about, and I suppose you are going down to the office."

Her father nodded his head.

He was a very good-looking man, so slightly built that, with his clean-shaven face and thick hair, only just powdered with white, he looked extraordinarily young.

"Yes, I shall go down," he said, "though I suppose I shall have my journey for nothing. If things don't improve I shall have to shut up the office, Angela."

"Oh, you mustn't despair!" answered the girl brightly. "After all, this beastly old war can't last for ever, and then you will have all your business tumbling about you once again."

Her father pinched her cheek.

"I only hope it may be something like that," he said. Then he added, "Brewster has been called up; he must go in a few days' time, and I suppose I shall have to have a woman in his place."

"Have me!" said Angela promptly. Then she kissed her father again. "Anyway, if I'm no good, please don't let Maud go to the office!"

Mr. Fayne laughed.

"My dear," he said, "I have some common sense left. Still," he added, with some recollection of his parental duty, "you must try and pull with your sister, Angela dearest. After all, she is your sister, you know."

"Yes, I suppose she is," said Angela, "worse luck!"

When everything was on the breakfast-tray she paused by her father's chair.

"Honor has sent me some money as a birthday present. I am going to use it for expenses of this visit to Lady Bettina Storrington. I know Maud wants to put a spoke in my wheel with you; but I simply must go, daddy! I don't know why," the girl added, "but I've a sort of an idea that something wonderful is going to happen to me on this visit!"

On the stairs Angela met her sister coming down.

"I've left you the hard-boiled egg!" said Angela.

As she stood on one side to let the tray go past Maud observed—

"Mother in bed again!"

She gave a little shrug of her shoulders and then went quickly down the stairs.

But the irritability which Maud aroused so unfortunately slipped away from Angela as she passed into Mrs. Fayne's

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room once again, and was rewarded by some tender words and the smile which made her mother so lovely in her eyes. She ran down a little later to help her father slip into his overcoat and after breakfast Angela went to the kitchen to interview the cook.

Not once but many times did Angela envy her sister Honor her gift of painting, and the fact that despite the havoc and the sorrow which war had brought into the country it was possible for her to make a living with her painting.

It would have been so helpful and so delightful if she, Angela, could have earned money in some way.

As it was she did all that was possible to her to lighten her mother's burdens and to do her share of war-work. She had been a V.A.D. in a hospital as well as doing orderly duties.

The Fayne establishment at this time was very typical of the majority of English homes in war-time.

By care and good management the family could manage to scrape along, and just before this story opens a little outside help had come.

When Mrs. Crosbye, the aunt who had for a time adopted Maud, wrote to announce her second marriage with a distinguished naval man, she also announced that she had arranged to pay the eldest Miss Fayne an income of three hundred pounds a year till she married, and of this money Maud gave half to her mother.

I am afraid it must be confessed that, though Angela welcomed anything which tended to ease the burden her mother carried, she regretted rather sharply the fact that this help should come from Maud. But she kept this to herself, only making daily note of the manner in which her eldest sister never failed to let their mother feel that in helping her family she was both self-sacrificing and generous. More than this, Angela resented the semi-critical, semi-supercilious manner with which her sister regarded her mother.

Mrs. Fayne was not brilliant or very gifted, but she had other qualities. She had the sweetest nature, and kept a

light and yet a firm hand on the guiding-reins of her small establishment. She was so resourceful, so by nature prone to light-heartedness, and by rearing so unfitted for troubles and hardship that it made Angela furious when her eldest sister found fault with their mother.

Perhaps if Honor had remained unmarried things might have been less difficult. Angela had been only a school-girl when Maud had returned home to live, and consequently she had been hotly intolerant of her eldest sister's stuck-up ways, and always ready and eager to range herself on the side of her parents.

Then the war had come, and with it so many sudden and unexpected changes that things had been levelled a little; instead of going to India, Honor Bellares and her husband had separated, Captain Bellares's regiment being one of the first of those to be drafted out to France, and in a pitifully short time the news came through that he had been killed.

Mrs. Fayne urged the young wife to take up her abode with her family; but Honor, when she had conquered her first anguish, had been too restless to settle down.

She had almost immediately flung herself into Red Cross work.

Angela had been at school that memorable first autumn of the war. It was not until she came back for the Christmas holidays that she had grasped the full significance of the tragedy that had been worked in her beloved sister's life, or indeed to the realization of the dread change that was being wrought in the ordinary everyday life of the English people.

Mrs. Bellares had been in Folkestone in connection with some of her hospital duties when the Christmas holidays arrived, and Angela went down to stay with her. The last remnant of her school-girlishness dropped from the younger sister in those days, as Mrs. Bellares found work for her to do. As long as she lived Angela would never forget the day she had been taken to one of the big hotels and drafted with other eager helpers to work among

the wounded Belgian soldiers who had been brought across the Channel for hospital treatment.

It was an ordeal which tried Angela so much that on returning to her room she had fainted from the sheer horror of the suffering and agony she had helped to alleviate.

But her spirit rose again when she saw how amazing was her sister's courage.

Not even when Captain Rayburn—who had been sent back from the Front wounded—sought out Mrs. Bellares to convey to her the deep regret and sympathy of her husband's fellow-officers did the young wife allow herself to lose that courage. It sustained her almost like a miracle through the ensuing months and rested on her like a blessing when her child was born. Both the doctors and Mrs. Fayne intervened afterwards to prevent Honor from continuing her hospital work.

For, though her spirit was so fine and her courage so radiant, physically she was much enfeebled; and the care of her little child demanded all the strength she had at her disposal.

Moreover, there was very little money. She had only her pension to live upon, and so it was that as soon as she was well enough she resolved to take up her painting again. Honor had studied at a well-known art school before her marriage, and was therefore technically well equipped. It had been a hard struggle at first to make a start, but friends and artists rallied round her and now she was advancing to a success which meant security in the future for her child and solace for herself.

CHAPTER IV

ANGELA arrived at Peniston Court about tea-time. A brougham had been sent to meet her at the station, and she had sat looking out at the greyness of the early afternoon as she had been bowled along at a fair pace.

It was raining, and there was a heavy mist in the air, but, though some people would have found the atmosphere most depressing, to Angela the journey was thrilling, and the excitement which crept into her heart increased decidedly as the minutes went by.

It was her first independent visit. Sometimes she had stayed with friends of her mother's, and on very rare occasions had been invited by some of her father's people on short visits ; but on such occasions she had generally gone with her sister Honor or her mother ; and indeed since the first winter of the war Angela had scarcely left London.

She felt very shy as she was shown into a big hall which seemed to be full of people.

Lady Bettina greeted her rather gushingly and made her sit down and have some tea ; but she had so many other people to look after that in a little while Angela was left to herself, for which she was grateful, because she wanted to conquer her shyness and to feel less awkward.

Then, after a time, her hostess's daughter came up to her.

Miss Storrington reminded Angela of Maud. Doubtless she imagined she was being very pleasant, but, as a matter of fact, she was merely condescending.

They exchanged a few remarks about Theo Masson and the workrooms, and then Miss Storrington drifted away again, and Angela was alone once more. Though she found Blanche Storrington unsympathetic, Angela admired her.

She had a very good figure and she wore her clothes with an air.

There had evidently been a meet in the neighbourhood, for some of the people were in riding-gear, much splashed with mud. Angela's attention was particularly attracted by one of the young men. Though he was in mufti, she would have known him as a soldier anywhere; moreover, he had his left arm strapped against his breast, and she heard some one with a particularly delightful voice remonstrating with him for having ridden an apparently unmanageable horse.

"I call it tempting Providence," this charming voice said.

But the young man only laughed back, and Angela found his laughter most delightful and infectious.

She wondered who he was. She had not been introduced to any one, and she was beginning to feel a little depressed as she was left sitting by herself.

By and by a dog came up to her and made friends. He was evidently fond of cake, for he stood with his nose laid on Angela's lap and his eyes fixed expectantly on the tea-table. Angela fed him with what remained on her plate, and as she did so the young man whose arm was injured turned round and saw her. He rose and came across the hall, calling to the dog as he did so.

"Beno, come here, sir! How dare you ask for more cake! You have had quite enough already; and you have put your muddy paws on this lady's skirt. I say, I'm awfully sorry!" he added.

"A little mud won't hurt my skirt," Angela answered; "and he's such a dear! I think it was awfully sweet of him to come and take pity on me."

The young man gave her a quick look.

He had heard her discussed before she arrived. Evidently Miss Storrington was not at all pleased that her mother should have invited this unknown girl, and everybody knew that Blanche Storrington ruled at Peniston.

The young man suddenly sat down and began to talk to Angela. He drew the dog between his knees and played caressingly with his ears with his sound hand as he did so.

"What's London looking like to-day?" he asked.

Angela shrugged her shoulders.

"Not inviting; although," she added quickly, "I love London. I don't care what it looks like, how much it pours, or fogs, or does anything else disagreeable. At least it is the one place where one feels one's alive."

"Ah, I suppose that is because you're a Londoner!" he answered. "Now, I get fed up with town before I've been there a week. Give me the country any time! Do you know this part of the world?"

Angela shook her head.

"No; I have never been here before. I have only been invited down now," she added quite frankly, "because Lady Bettina wants me to sing at her concerts. Miss Masson advised her to invite me."

"You mean Theo Masson?" the young man said. "She is a top-hole sort of girl, isn't she?"

Angela laughed.

"Yes; that describes her exactly. We work together at the same war depot. She is my head, as it were. I'm an orderly."

"Awful tough job, I should think, isn't it?"

"Sometimes. I used to get awfully tired when I first started in, but I'm getting used to it now; although sometimes one does get rubbed up tremendously the wrong way. You see," said Angela, "there are such a lot of people who think they have the right to order us about, quite forgetting that we are not paid servants but give our services. I'm turned into a messenger-boy very often," the girl laughed, "and sometimes I am sent out to fetch a cab when it is pouring with rain, and I also have to answer telephones, and then the door, and there is one old lady who considers that I, as an orderly, ought to stand at attention whenever she comes into the hall, and as she is popping in and out every minute I am afraid my other duties would never be done if I gratified her."

"I say," said the young man, "that sounds a bit thick! I should strike at having to run out and get a cab in the rain."

He was looking at her with interest and admiration. He thought her extremely pretty, and he liked her fresh frank manner.

" Oh, it's all in a day's work ! " said Angela. " It isn't worse than washing up or scrubbing tables. I've been a V.A.D. pantry girl before I was an orderly ! " she explained.

" Well, you've certainly done your share and must have a good rest while you are down here. Do you ride ? "

" I've had some lessons," said Angela, " but I don't suppose you'd call it riding. I can at least stick on. You've been hunting, haven't you ? I thought all the hunts had been done away with."

" Ours won't last beyond Christmas. Of course I suppose it's all right, but we seem to be going in for such wholesale changes over here, don't we ? "

" Yes," said Angela ; and she suddenly sobered. " But, then, you see, what we have to put up with seems so very, very little to what others have to endure. I suppose you've been out there and you can endorse that ? "

" Yes, I've been out there," he said, " and I'm going back again in a very little while, I hope."

At this moment one of the women, who had been standing in a group chatting and laughing, looked at Angela and her companion, and then she came slowly towards them.

She was very tall, and was dressed in a well cut but sensible coat and skirt.

" Dickie dear, do you see the time ? " she said. " I thought you were going to meet the train ? "

He looked up at her.

" She's not due for nearly an hour."

" Yes ; but you ought to get out of those wet clothes. As a matter of fact I am rather sorry you said you would go to the station. I think you ought to have just a quiet hour in your room."

The young man looked at Angela with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

" My sister would keep me in bed all day, I believe, if she could." He glanced at the wristlet watch he wore and then got up a trifle reluctantly. " Well, I suppose

I'd better be making a move ; anyhow, I'll go and see if the car is coming round."

He gave Angela another smile, and with a nod of his head to his sister he walked away.

" He really isn't over-strong yet," remarked the latter as she sat down where he had been sitting. Angela then saw that though she was older there was a marked resemblance to her brother. " He came home a positive wreck. But he's got so much spirit ; and, after all, it is hard to keep him an invalid, isn't it ? "

" Yes, of course it is ! " said Angela.

All her brightness and awkwardness had flown into the background. She felt quite at home ; her late companion had restored her courage, and his sister was just as pleasant.

" I think you must be Miss Fayne, are you not ? " this lady remarked after they had chatted a little while. " We are looking forward so much to hearing you sing."

" Oh, *please* don't expect great things ! " said Angela. " I—I only sing very simple songs, and I don't get very much time for practice nowadays."

" Well, simple songs are delightful. I am sure they are what the soldiers like best." Then she added, " I do hope Dickie will put on his thickest overcoat. Will you forgive me if I run after him and see what he is wearing ? "

Angela assented.

" Of course ! "

But after the tall figure in the tweed coat and skirt had disappeared she glanced about her and noticed that she was the only one left in the hall, and she felt just a little depressed.

The thought flashed through her mind how pleased Maud would have been if she could see her now.

" Evidently," she said to herself, " I'm not a very important guest."

But at that very moment Lady Bettina came bustling towards her.

" Oh, my dear," she said, " do forgive me ! Have you had your tea ? Have you been looked after ? Why are you here all by yourself ? Some one must take you to

your room. Where is Blanche ? " She called to a maid who was passing. " Where is Miss Storrington ? "

The maid said she thought that Miss Storrington had gone to the stables.

Lady Bettina made a little impatient movement.

" My daughter sees to all the arrangements," she said. " I am afraid I hardly know which room you are going to have. Perhaps you know, Parker ? "

The maid said she would ask the housekeeper. She was back again almost directly, and Lady Bettina let her conduct Angela out of the hall.

It was a big rambling old house, and Angela plucked up courage to ask the maid to explain to her exactly which staircase to take.

" It is a little bit difficult at first, miss," the servant said, " till you get used to all the turnings and passages. Miss Storrington is very sorry that she has been obliged to give you Mr. Edward's room. He is over in France, miss ; he's in the Flying Corps. Mrs. Gunter, the housekeeper, had a fire lit early this morning, so that the room should not feel too cold. You see, miss, this is really on the level with the garden, and these long windows make it a bit chilly."

But Angela was walking round the room, looking about her with delight.

" Oh, I think it's simply charming here ! " she said. " What a quaint old room ! And is this a dressing-room ? " She advanced to a door beside the fire-place.

" No, miss ; that's Mr. Edward's workshop. He was always inventing things and making experiments. That is why he had these two rooms, because he could come and go as he liked. I'll send some one to unpack your box, miss," added the maid ; " and if you want anything will you please ring that bell ? "

As she left Angela and went in search of the housemaid who attended to these rooms Parker remarked—

" I call it a downright shame of Miss Blanche to put that girl in there. She might have given it to one of the gentlemen. I suppose she doesn't think that she's of

much account, seeing as she's only come down because of the concerts."

"Miss Blanche, she don't think no one of no account 'cepting herself!" remarked the housemaid.

"Well, mind you see that the shutters are closed. It is all very well, but it's awfully chilly in that room. I shouldn't care to sleep in it. She's a nice little thing, too," added Parker. "Got a lot of pretty red-coloured hair."

Angela sat down at the writing-table and scribbled a few lines to her mother while the housemaid unpacked her box. She gave an amusing account of her journey, and declared that everything was "too thrilling for words" at Peniston.

"I'm going to wear my little green dress this evening," she scribbled. "I shall keep Honor's white *crêpe de Chine* gown for the concert. I feel a long way off, and it is very funny to be all on my own. But I shan't be away very long. Take care of yourself, you darling thing! Don't get over-tired; and always remember you are the most precious creature in the world to your loving Angela."

"I should like this letter to go to-night if possible," she said to the housemaid.

"I'll take it down to the hall now, miss. The bag will be going in another few minutes."

Left to herself, Angela slipped out of her coat and skirt and into the pink dressing-gown—which, after all, her mother had insisted upon her taking—then she explored her apartment, and even ventured to look once again into the workshop.

Outside the wind was rustling the branches of the trees; they made a noise like waves on the seashore.

The housemaid had carefully closed the shutters and drawn the curtains in her bedroom; but in the workshop she could still see out into the dusk, and as she moved forward towards the long window she saw the lights of a motor-car coming up through the avenue, and conjectured that this must be the car returning from the station. She

wondered if the young man had worn his thickest overcoat. He was very nice! She could quite understand his sister's anxiety about him.

When the housemaid came back she brought a letter for Angela.

"I was just in time to catch the postman, miss," she said; "and Mr. Hole, that's the butler, he gave me that for you."

"A letter for me!" said Angela, with much surprise; but as she glanced at the handwriting she said, "Oh, it is from Miss Masson!" and then she thanked the housemaid, and when she was alone sat down on the hearthrug and read Theo Masson's letter.

"I thought perhaps you would like to have a few words to greet you on your arrival. Aunt Betty is a dear soul, and I know she will be kind to you; but she is always so fussed if the house is full, and then she is so much under the thumb of Blanche, that, if you find she is not looking after you as well as she ought to, please don't think she means to neglect you. I wish I could be with you! I should love to hear you sing. I know you are going to have a ripping success!

"I hear that Patricia Lessingham will be at Peniston, and I wonder how you will like her, and if you will think her as beautiful as she is supposed to be? Between you and me and the gatepost I can't stick her! But then I have got my own ideas about beauty.

"I hear also that Magna Chatfield is staying with Aunt Betty, and that her brother, Dicky Bosworth, is there too. I'm awfully fond of Dicky. He's a dear! Much too good to be running after that Lessingham creature, as I'm very much afraid he is. I'm writing a few lines to Magna and asking her to look after you and see that you are well taken care of, because I know what Blanche is! Find time to write to me to tell me how you are enjoying yourself. I have missed you so much to-day. You are the best orderly I've got."

This letter cheered up Angela very much, for, although

she had written so brightly to her mother, she felt just a little subdued.

Coming as a stranger to the house, it would certainly have been nice if Miss Storrington had shown her a little attention.

"However, I'm here, and I must make the best of things," she told herself. "I shall try and come upstairs as soon as I possibly can. I can always pretend I'm sleepy."

CHAPTER V

ANGELA had been afraid that she would be late when she left her room: she had found an interesting book and had sat reading in front of the fire for a long time. But she need not have been at all anxious, for when she reached the hall she found it as empty as it had been when she went up to dress.

Glancing about her, she saw that the doors leading into the drawing-room were thrown open and that a great big fire blazed invitingly on the hearth. Evidently it was here that Lady Bettina and her guests assembled before dinner, so Angela made her way into this room.

It was almost as big as the hall itself; was full of old-fashioned furniture, sweet with the fragrance of flowers, and, although it was so big, it was a homelike apartment by reason of its pretty chintz covers and curtains, its big writing-table, and the work-basket beside the arm-chair by the fire-place piled with khaki-coloured material and balls of wool.

The presence too of several dogs took away from any element of grandeur or stiffness.

Angela sat down and picked up one of the evening newspapers after she had made friends with the dogs. From where she sat she could see herself in a mirror. She looked very young and small in such a big room. The dress she wore was an old one; but it was a favourite with her, and so she wore it with comfort. There was nothing fashionable about it; but when she glanced at her feet Angela had a little thrill of satisfaction. Her mother had insisted upon her buying two or three pairs of shoes, and those that she had on now were distinctly becoming.

Though the clock pointed to a minute or two from eight, Angela had the room to herself; then all at once she heard voices and the approach of others.

Lady Bettina was the first to come bustling in. She was always in a hurry, and she wore beads and so many little hanging things that she made a jangling noise as she walked.

Behind her came a tall young woman whom Angela recognized immediately.

Miss Lessingham wore the same dress in which she had been painted, and even carried a book in her hand. Mrs. Bellares had reproduced her to the life! She walked direct to the fire-place and stood with one foot on the fender. There was something arrogant in her attitude, a semi-contempt for all those who might try to rival her.

Certainly she was a beautiful creature, judged by lines and symmetry, by feature and by colouring. Her profile was almost perfect; but Angela found no reason to change her first opinion when she looked full into the eyes.

"She is glorious; I think I never saw any one so splendid; but she is a cat all the same, I'm sure of it," was what the girl said to herself.

Lady Bettina had introduced them, and Miss Lessingham had just given a little nod of her head and a perfunctory smile. She had taken in at a glance the slight girl in the green frock, and against herself had given a little tribute of admiration to Angela's wonderful hair. Then she had taken no further notice of the other girl, but stood reading a letter which she had in her hand and which, when she had come to the end, she flung into the fire.

A rush of colour suddenly dyed Angela's cheeks as she remembered that other letter which even now was locked away in the little jewel-case she had brought with her; and this colour was lingering in her cheeks when Mrs. Chatfield came up to her and spoke to her while other guests filtered into the room.

"I have had a letter from Theo Masson," Mrs. Chatfield remarked. "She said we were to make great friends with one another. I don't think that will be very difficult, Miss Fayne."

"I have had a letter too," Angela answered. "It was very sweet of Miss Masson to write; but she is such a dear! I like her so much!"

"Yes, Theo is a great favourite. I wonder who is going to take you in to dinner?" pursued Mrs. Chatfield as she glanced about her. "We are usually rather informal here and pick and choose our own partners."

Angela glanced about her and then shivered slightly.

"It is awfully stupid of me, but I'm just a little nervous," she said. "I have never stayed by myself in such a big house-party before."

"I know exactly how you feel," said Mrs. Chatfield; and then she said, "Ah, the very man!"

She made a little sign with her hand to a middle-aged man whom Angela had already noticed and who had attracted her because he reminded her of her father.

He came across the room very slowly in answer to Mrs. Chatfield's summons, and then Angela realized that he was lame.

The next moment she had given her hand to Colonel Quaine, and in a laughing manner was deprecating things Mrs. Chatfield was saying about her. Then as dinner was announced Angela found that Colonel Quaine had offered her his arm, and she had walked out of the room beside him, ignorant of the fact that Blanche Storrington had frowned as she had seen them together.

"I meant you to go in with Colonel Quaine, Magna," she said; but the other woman only laughed.

"Oh, I am quite capable of taking care of myself! It is a different matter for that other little creature. She is just a wee bit nervous—which is natural when one remembers that we are all strangers to her. I felt that I was putting her into safe hands!"

They were all seated at dinner when the young man who had spoken to Angela in the hall before dinner came hurrying in.

In his evening garb—none of the men wore khaki now—he looked handsomer than before, though as she glanced at him across the table Angela could see now how ill he must have been, for his face was still a little wasted.

He sat next to Patricia Lessingham, and they began immediately to talk together in a confidential way.

"I see you are looking at Miss Lessingham," Colonel Quaine remarked after a little while. "She is a beautiful creature, isn't she?"

"Very!" Angela answered, and then she added, "My sister has just painted her portrait."

"Oh!" said Colonel Quaine, and he turned to look at her with renewed interest. "Is Mrs. Bellares your sister? I am delighted to meet you, Miss Fayne! I admire your sister immensely. She is a great artist, and a very lovely and a brave woman!"

A little mist came over Angela's eyes and her hand trembled as she lifted some soup to her lips.

"Thank you," she said. A little later she asked, "Have you seen Miss Lessingham's portrait?"

"Yes, she took me to Mrs. Bellares's studio last week. The portrait was not then quite finished, but it was far enough advanced for me to see what a magnificent piece of work it is. I think I shall ask Mrs. Bellares to paint my daughter's portrait, only I am afraid that if she were to undertake this I should be obliged to ask her to come and stay with us, as my girl is paralysed. She has not been able to walk for several years. A hunting accident," explained Colonel Quaine.

"I am sure Honor would gladly do this portrait," Angela said. "I want her to be as busy as she can possibly be, because while her mind is occupied and she has plenty to do there isn't too much time for her to sit down and think."

At this moment she was looking across the table almost unconsciously, and then she saw that some one was smiling at her, and she smiled back. It was the young man sitting beside Patricia Lessingham.

"Will you tell me who most of the people are here to-night?" Angela asked Colonel Quaine a few minutes later. "I really know no one!"

He gave her an account of most of the people present.

"I live quite close to Peniston," he explained. "So the Storringtons' friends are chiefly the same as my own."

He seemed to know the majority of the guests.

"The young man opposite is Richard Bosworth. He is in

the Guards. A fine soldier, and a real good sort! One of the lucky ones too, for he owns more money than he knows what to do with. Evidently he is going to pour his fortune and all he possesses at the feet of the beauteous Patricia! I am afraid," Colonel Quaine said, with a little dryness in his voice, "that that fact constitutes his great attraction in her eyes!"

"But Miss Lessingham is rich herself, is she not? At least, I seemed to gain that impression from my sister."

Colonel Quaine shook his head.

"No. Old Lessingham was very well off, but since the war things have been going badly with him. I fancy he has been very hard hit, and this of course will make a great difference for his girl. From what I can hear, I'm afraid Miss Patricia does not take kindly to her father's changed condition." Then Colonel Quaine changed the conversation and talked to Angela about herself and her war-work and her singing; and he was so genial and showed so much interest in her that he gradually worked the last little thread of nervousness out of her system, so that when the ladies rose to leave the dining-room Angela felt quite at her ease.

She sat beside Mrs. Chatfield on one of the big couches in the hall, and in a little while Miss Lessingham came up to them. She was smoking a cigarette, and that same note of arrogance which Angela had at once remarked was clearly discernible in her bearing.

Angela was not to know that at the dinner-table Captain Bosworth had sharply annoyed his companion by his frank admiration for the little girl opposite.

"Isn't her hair ripping?" he had asked. "I don't think I have ever seen such a lovely colour. She is rather a dear little soul, isn't she?"

Miss Lessingham had agreed that Angela's hair was very beautiful. It was her custom always to approve of the admiration any man expressed for another woman; but she none the less resented such admiration.

"Aren't you going to sing something for us?" she asked Angela as she stood with her hand on her hip, tall and

imperious in a gown which seemed to be composed of gold-tissue.

"Oh, I fancy Miss Fayne is tired to-night!" Mrs. Chatfield interposed quickly.

But Angela shook her head.

"I am not in the least tired," she said. "Of course I will sing for Lady Bettina, if she would like me to."

Miss Lessingham turned her head, and with a slightly raised voice said—

"Lady Bettina, Miss Fayne will sing for us, if you will ask her."

Lady Bettina got up at once and jangled and jingled towards Angela.

"Oh, that will be charming—quite delightful!" she said. "But isn't that rather encroaching on you, my dear?" Angela deprecated this and made her way towards the piano, and as she did so Miss Lessingham sat down on the couch beside Mrs. Chatfield.

"I haven't seen you for ages!" she remarked. "I thought you were going to be in town this last week."

"I never go to London if I can possibly avoid it," Mrs. Chatfield answered. "Besides, I thought I had better come down here to look after Dicky. He will not take care of himself."

"Oh, well, that's comprehensible enough!" said Patricia Lessingham. "Most men hate being regarded as an invalid longer than is absolutely necessary." With a little pause she added, "And Dicky seems to me to be very fit these days."

"Oh, you judge on the surface, my dear!" said Mrs. Chatfield.

She turned away from Miss Lessingham and directed her attention on Angela.

The girl had seated herself at the piano and was playing softly. Lady Bettina was fluttering about her, making remarks and asking questions all at the same time.

Then Angela began to sing.

She purposely chose the music which she thought would be appreciated by this particular audience. Her first song

was a little French one with a running and rather difficult accompaniment. To a very natural talent and a pure sweet voice Angela quickly evinced that she had been well trained.

Mrs. Chatfield applauded her warmly at the end of the song.

"Another, please!" she said; to which Miss Lessingham added, "Can you sing something Italian?"

Angela paused only a moment, and then she sang one of Tosti's delightful and least well-known ballads.

The sound of the music penetrated to the dining-room, and in a little while the men came out into the hall.

"I say, what a ripping voice!" said Captain Bosworth. He had of course found his way to the couch where Miss Lessingham was seated; his sister had already risen and crossed to the piano.

As he sat down the young man spoke eagerly to Miss Lessingham.

"I say, dearest, you are going to let me tell Magna to-night? I am sure she is waiting for me to speak."

Miss Lessingham shrugged her shoulders.

"Are you sure that you want to tell her anything?"

Then she laughed.

"Don't look so pathetic!" She flung away the end of her cigarette with a sort of little reckless action.

"Yes, I think it would be just as well if you did enlighten your sister, especially as we intend to get married so quickly. I must warn you however, Dicky, my dear! You are in for something disagreeable, because your sister does not like me." She only laughed when the young man protested that she was making a mistake. "I know what I am talking about," she persisted. "I'm the very last kind of woman whom Mrs. Chatfield wants you to marry."

They sank their voices to a whisper as Angela began to sing again.

This time she chose an English song with a very delightful refrain.

One by one the guests had strolled up to the piano, and the singer now found herself surrounded by a small audience.

Lady Bettina Storrington was most enthusiastic.

"Now the success of my concert is assured," she declared. "And you are so clever, my dear," she added. "Imagine remembering all that lovely music! What a gift to be able to sit down and play and sing with such ease!"

They kept Angela at the piano for nearly an hour.

Looking round at her audience when she came to the end of her programme, she saw that Captain Bosworth had joined the others.

"I say, you know you've got a top-hole voice, Miss Fayne!" he remarked. "I don't know a note of music myself, but I simply adore hearing it!"

Miss Lessingham had not joined the group at the piano.

She had sauntered up to the big fire, and as she stood there looking into it with a curious intensity one of the servants brought her a note.

"Just come by hand, miss, from the town," he said. "The messenger's waiting to see if there's an answer."

Miss Lessingham's face had contracted for an instant as she glanced at the note and recognized the writing; then with a great effort she opened it calmly and read it through.

"There is no answer," she said.

The servant turned away, and she remained staring into the fire.

To all outward appearances she was as calm as usual; inwardly she was raging; and as she flung the note she had read into the fire she clenched her hands and threw back her head with a gesture of defiance. So she stood for the space of a few seconds, then her attitude changed. It would seem as though some new thought had flashed into her mind. At any rate she paused irresolutely a short spell longer, then giving a sharp glance round, she slipped away, just as Angela in response to Captain Bosworth's suggestion began to play some ragtime, and one or two of the guests hastened to push aside the chairs and the rugs so that there should be good space for dancing.

CHAPTER VI

IT was a very wet and stormy night: every now and then the wind blew in deep gusts, drenching the trees and the paths and the grass with heavy rain: moreover, it was very dark: the military regulations for shrouding the lights in this big house were very carefully observed, and there was not a glimmer of the brilliancy within to be detected by a person outside.

It was not presumably a night on which any one would have chosen to loiter about, yet there was one individual adventurous enough evidently to brave the inclement elements.

He stood at a particular corner against a clump of trees from which all movement from the house could be observed: in a sense this clump of trees served as a shelter and a protection, except when an extra fierce gust of wind caused the wet branches to swirl about unpleasantly.

The wildness of the night irritated the man who was waiting and watching. Now and again he walked to and fro a few steps, stamping his feet, for it was very cold; and as he did so he swore rather viciously; and now and again he made a little sound with his lips as though he were in great pain; then suddenly he caught sight of a spark of light moving in the distance (evidently the light from an electric torch) and he stood still again, watching some one approaching along the terrace. The wind died down at this moment and he could hear the sound of footsteps clearly. He left the shelter of the trees and advanced to meet the figure that was coming nearer.

"I'm here," he said. "Turn a little to the left. So—mind that bit of railing. It is too rough out here," he added. "We can't hear ourselves speak. There's a summer-house just over yonder. Follow me."

Patricia Lessingham obeyed him resentfully. She hated all discomfort, and it was more than disagreeable out in the

rain and wind; worse than that, it was humiliating. She stumbled more than once as she followed him. Her feet in their dainty shoes were unpleasantly wet and her hair was blown about by the wind.

The fact that the summer-house was sheltered and even cosy brought her no sense of relief. She flashed her torch about and sat down on the rough wooden seat which ran round the small place.

"Sorry to bring you out on such a beastly night, but it isn't my fault, you know," the man said.

She answered him with a touch of suppressed fury.

"I don't know what you mean by that, any more than I know why you need be so absurdly mysterious? Surely if you want to see me so much you could have come to the house?"

He paused an instant before answering her, and if her eyes had cared to pierce the gloom she would have noticed that he was supporting his left arm with his right hand and that he seemed to tremble as though the pain he was enduring was almost unbearable; but his voice was dry and bitter as he answered her—

"Well, I'm pretty certain it wouldn't have pleased you if I had turned up; that was one reason. The other is that I'm not supposed to be anywhere near here, I should have rather upset the apple cart if I had asked Lady Bettina to take me in."

"But——" she began; and he interrupted her sharply.

"I warned you in my last letter that you might expect to see me turning up at an inconvenient moment, if you would not do as I asked, answer my questions, so here I am and not at all welcome, and if this doesn't please you, my dear, you've only yourself to blame. If you had chosen to go straight with me you wouldn't have been dragged out into a wild night like this to hear some unpleasant truths."

She laughed not very easily.

"My dear Derry," she said. "How perfectly ridiculous! I don't think any one could be straighter than I've been. Goodness knows I've done my level best to let you

see for months past how hopeless everything was for us."

"When I say you haven't been straight," he answered her, and his voice was tired and strained and he was moving his body to and fro restlessly, "you know what I mean. It was up to you to have finished things the last time I was over, but instead of that you went on fooling me and actually talked about our future. You never gave me an inkling of what you've got in your mind now."

"How do you know what I've got in my mind now?" she retorted.

He sat down rather heavily on the bench.

"Oh! it's been easy enough," he answered her, in that same strained voice, "though you haven't bothered to write to me, and I suppose you know you haven't answered a single letter of mine for a couple of months; news gets through; and when Storrington told me you were down here for this week-end, and I had a chance of getting over, I determined to take it."

"You might have sent me a wire."

It was his turn to laugh, a grim sort of laugh.

"There was no time for wires or any such thing. Storrington got his orders for a special mission at a moment's notice, and he took me up as his observer. We crossed the Channel easily, but were buckled up in the gale when we were over Kent and came down rather sharply in a field. Luckily, Storrington wasn't hurt and made tracks for the nearest station, but I was crumpled up a bit when I was shot out. Don't ask me how I got here. Honestly I couldn't tell you." He was still moving to and fro, nursing his injured arm, and they were silent a short spell, then Miss Lessingham said—

"I could have met you in town."

He understood all that she did not put into words.

"Look here, Pat," he said, "you can trust me, you know. I'm not going to do anything violent. Of course I've been a dolt and an ass for a very long time, but I am beginning now to have my lucid moments, which means that I can see through a brick wall as well as most people;

and though I am here to ask questions, I've understood the meaning of your silence quite clearly."

"Then——" She paused.

"Suppose," he said, answering her—"Suppose I had a fancy to let you tell me with your own lips that you've given me the chuck, and you don't care a d——n what becomes of me?"

She answered him a little shrilly.

"You know perfectly well that I care for you as much as I shall ever care for anybody; but what was the use of going on? How on earth *could* we marry? We haven't a penny between us, and what is worse, we never shall have. If we were to have married it would have been a miserable business, so instead of ragging me you ought really to be very much obliged. At least you've got one responsibility off your shoulders."

"Oh! I am very much obliged," he observed, "and immensely pleased. This is what I wanted. I mean, I wanted to hear your views, not put prettily, but expressed sensibly and straightforwardly. The only fault I have to find is that you might have put these same views before me when I was over on my last leave. You see, I hate double dealing, and it *is* pretty mean of you, Pat, to have kept me hanging on while you fixed things up for yourself with somebody else."

"It doesn't seem to have broken your heart," she said; and there was a sneer in her voice.

He answered her passionately, roughly.

"Leave my heart out of the question,' he said. "Come to facts. That's what I'm here for. Yo'u have broken with me for good and all, haven't you? and you are going to marry this chap Bosworth?"

A slight uneasiness crept into her voice as she answered him very hurriedly.

"What you have never understood, Derry, is that there was never a proper engagement between us. We just drifted along, and if you were mad enough to suppose that some day it might end in marriage, well! that is really not my fault."

"Are you going to marry this other man?" he asked her.

She prevaricated.

"I may or I may not; that is my business."

"And his, poor devil! I'm sorry for him."

"You are being odiously rude and stupid," she retorted; "and I dare say you've some insane idea in your mind about upsetting things. Well"—she laughed a little hysterically—"you can do any mean thing you choose; it won't make a scrap of difference. Dicky really cares for me, and he believes in me, you see."

"My congratulations to Captain Bosworth. Supposing you get back to the house. We haven't said very much, but we've said enough."

"Of course you are blaming me for everything," she answered resentfully. "*You* haven't done anything wrong, have you? You want to make yourself out very badly used. Perhaps you might deceive other people, but you can't deceive me! At least I was straightforward enough with you about transferring into the Flying Corps. You did that dead against my wishes, but——" she gave a shrug of her shoulders. "What *is* the use of going on? If I didn't write to you, you might be decent enough to recognize that I had a little consideration for you."

At this he laughed aloud, and there was such a curious sound in his voice that she pressed her torch and the light fell full on him. She then saw that his left arm was helpless, and that he was looking drawn and pale; down one side of his face there was a dark mark, and she shivered a little as she saw that there was another cut on his brow on which some blood was congealed.

"Have you hurt yourself badly?" she queried nervously.

"Just a bit chipped." He laughed again and his eyes burned. "But I shall get away all right, Pat. Don't worry. And now we have said all there is to say, don't you think you'd better go back quickly? or the man with the money may be coming out to see what's happening to you, and then there might be trouble, you know. For although he believes in you, poor soul, he may not be so sensible as I am."

The hand holding the torch dropped to her side, and she moved to the door; there she paused.

"How are you going to get away?"

"I've told you not to fret. I'm not out to spoil sport, my dear Pat. On the contrary, now that I have had the truth from your own lips, do you know I—I'm more than half inclined to be very grateful to Captain Bosworth. If you don't hurry," he added, "you'll get into a deluge in a moment or two, and I'm sure you won't care about that."

She hesitated as though she would have answered this, then she pulled the cloak she wore round her more closely, and walked out of the summer-house.

She was nervous, bad-tempered, anxious till she had got back to the safety of her own room; but at the same time she was conscious of a curious bitterness mingling in with her natural relief at having disposed of an awkward and vexing business.

Though matters had gone as she meant them to go, she felt discomfited and her vanity was distinctly bruised. She had prepared herself for recrimination and pleading. His matter-of-fact manner, his lithe, cynical touches were so strange coming from him. Once she paused as though she would have gone back; but it was only a fleeting weakness, and hurrying over the wet grass she regained the house and her own room unremarked.

* * * * *

Angela was kept at the piano some while longer, and then Mrs. Chatfield intervened.

"Now I think it is your turn to dance," she said. "I'll do my best as a band."

Miss Storrington had unearthed a quantity of music, and in a few moments Mrs. Chatfield was "doing her best" and Angela was dancing away merrily.

Captain Bosworth was her first partner; although he had only one arm at his disposal, this seemed to make no difference to his dancing. They kept in step perfectly.

After that Angela went from one partner to another till she found herself a little breathless sitting beside Colonel Quaine.

He paid her many compliments on her singing and dancing, and ended by asking her half wistfully if she thought she would come some time and spend a few days with his daughter.

" I'm afraid you will find it rather dull. Anne has to be kept fairly quiet ; but I'm perfectly sure that she would be altogether better and brighter if she were to have your company for a little while. You see, I'm not able to be at home as much as I was ; my military duties take me to different parts of the kingdom. I've tried very hard to get out yonder, but they tell me that I'm too useful here." He made a slightly wry face. " That is another way of informing me civilly that I'm too old for any real business. Well, I suppose I can do my duty for my country by obeying orders over here ! And, after all, there is plenty of work for any man nowadays."

Captain Bosworth was standing by the piano arguing with his sister about a certain tune, when Patricia Lessingham came back into the hall.

She gave a quick glance round and drew a sharp breath. She had nerved herself for questions ; but as luck would have it no one had seen her leave or return, and that little interview out in the wet windy night might almost have been a dream.

As the music started again Richard Bosworth turned round and saw her. He turned towards her quickly.

" Here you are ! " he said. " I was half afraid you had gone off to bed. I say," he added, " you look awfully pale, dearest ! Is anything wrong ? "

She laughed slightly.

" Oh, no ! I don't feel very grand. Probably I've caught a cold. I felt a little stupid just now, so I thought I would go to my room for a few minutes. I have some wonderful stuff which I always take when I fancy a cold is starting. I shall be all right again directly. Aren't you going to ask me to dance ? " she added, giving him a smile.

For answer he slipped his sound arm round her and they moved gracefully in time to the measure.

Angela sat and watched them. Impressionable as most

young girls are, she had already lost her heart in a sense to Captain Bosworth. And though she was no nearer to liking Patricia, she could not withhold a tribute of admiration for Miss Lessingham, who in her dancing showed that the beauty of movement as well as beauty of feature belonged to her.

No other couple got up to dance; and when the music came to an end those who were sitting about applauded Captain Bosworth and his partner.

The rest of the evening passed very pleasantly for Angela; all her shyness had gone. She felt now indubitably that she had made a good impression; in fact, when at last the party dispersed for the night Lady Bettina kissed her quite affectionately.

"I shall write to Theo to-morrow and tell her how grateful I am for making us acquainted, my dear," she said.

Blanche Storrington now showed a little more amiability.

When Angela held out her hand to say "Good night" she turned and went out of the hall with the girl.

"I'll take you to your room," she said; "and I must apologize for putting you in that corner of the house, but we are so full—as we shall have some invalids staying here to-morrow and the next night—that I was at my wits' ends to know how to arrange for everybody."

"I think it's a perfectly charming room," said Angela. "I'm not accustomed to so much space." She chatted on lightly as they travelled through the many passages till they came to the door of Angela's room, and then they said "Good night."

"Although you are practically alone in this part of the house, you can easily get some one to come to you by ringing your bell," Miss Storrington said.

But Angela laughed.

"Oh, I shan't be nervous! I shall sleep soundly. I am very tired, and of course I feel a difference in the air."

"We breakfast at nine; but if you care to have yours in your room——"

But again Angela laughed and shook her head.

" Oh, no, I am always up early ! Good night, and thank you so much ! "

As she walked down the corridor Blanche Storrington felt a little feeling of compunction.

She had been annoyed with her mother when she had been informed that this unknown girl was coming to stay. Now she felt as if she had treated this guest very shabbily ; but she resolved that she would make amends for this on the morrow.

She need not have feared criticism on Angela's part. The girl when she was alone in her bedroom sat down on the hearthrug in front of the fire and gave herself up to recalling the events of the evening. She felt that she could quite safely write and tell her mother that she had made a good start ; and she planned a long letter to Theo Masson.

As she glanced about her it struck her as being strange that Miss Storrington should have apologized for putting her into this room, for, with the curtains drawn and the fire blazing cheerily and all her own little possessions unpacked it presented a delightful aspect to Angela.

Mrs. Fayne had not only persisted in putting in her best dressing-gown, she had lent the girl her dressing-case, so that there was an array of silver brushes and other articles on the dressing-table and the clock which belonged to the case was ticking on the little table beside the bed.

" I am putting you in some brandy," Mrs. Fayne had said, " as well as eau-de-Cologne. Of course you don't believe you will need it, and I hope you won't, but it is always a good thing to have some with you. I have also put you in a box of night-lights, darling ! "

Angela had hugged her mother.

" You are a dear sweet thing," she said. " You think of everything ! "

She took up her mother's picture now and kissed it, and then she bestowed a like embrace on the portrait of her father and of Honor and her baby.

Maud did not picture in this little gallery, and Angela felt a little mean as she realized this.

"After all, she *is* my sister," she said to herself. "I mustn't altogether forget that. Well, I suppose it is about time to get undressed."

She got up with a yawn and stretched her arms, and then she began to unfasten her bodice; though this was hooked at the back, she could manage to get out of it easily.

The task of undressing did not progress very far, however. Angela had just untied the ribbon at the top of her bodice when she stood suddenly still and her heart began to thump violently under her dress.

Outside the wind had dropped; it was very still—so still now that the noise which had attracted Angela's attention was all the more noticeable.

The girl gripped the corner of the dressing-table. She was trembling from head to foot and all the colour had gone out of her face. Just for an instant or so silence reigned, then there came again that curious, that horrible sound, the sound of some one moaning as if in pain, and with that, other sounds—the scraping back of a chair, and heavy footsteps, and even whilst poor Angela stood staring at the door like one paralysed with fear there came surer indications that the workshop was occupied, for some one had gripped the handle and was turning it, evidently intent on opening the door that led into the bedroom.

Just for an instant Angela lost grip of herself. She gave a choked exclamation, and turned to stagger to the place where the bell was, but as she did so the occupant of the workshop spoke.

"Is there any one there?" a voice asked faintly. "Can you hear me? Is there any one there?"

The speech was followed by a rapping on the door.

A thousand different emotions seemed to rush through Angela's mind. Fear was predominant; but whether it came from instinct or whether the suffering in the voice broke through her fear she never knew. She hesitated just a little while, and then as the rapping continued and the hoarse whispering went on she took all her courage in her hands and walked towards the door.

Turning the key she opened it slowly. As it swung back Angela gave a little stifled scream and retreated a step or two. In truth there was great excuse for her fright, for the man clinging to the door-post looked most alarming. He was ashen white, and this pallor threw into greater prominence the cut on his forehead and the dark abrasion all down one side of his face. He tried to speak.

"Awfully sorry . . . don't be frightened. I'll explain," he broke off, and then he said faintly, "some water . . . would you——"

Even as the words escaped his lips his strength seemed to give way ; he sank suddenly on to his knees and then gradually collapsed into a heap on the floor of the workshop.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN she discovered that the mysterious person who had hailed her from behind the door was neither a supernatural being nor a burglar, Angela's heart began to thump less violently. Her experiences as a V.A.D. in a hospital had accustomed her to the sight of physical suffering and came to her rescue now. Wholly strange and upsetting as the position was she gathered her wits together and prepared for action.

The man was certainly very ill, and her first duty was to do what she could at the moment and then call for help.

Quick to think and quick to act, Angela had opened the dressing-case and poured some brandy and water into the glass from her washstand, then damping a pocket-handkerchief with eau-de-Cologne, she went bravely forward into the workshop.

He was in a sitting position ; and his head was hanging heavily forward on his breast.

The girl knelt beside him, and putting an arm about his neck drew his head to rest on her shoulder ; then she put the glass to his lips.

" Please drink this."

He made no effort to respond, though she kept the glass near to his lips, so she set it down ; and then she dabbed his face with the handkerchief, still damp with the restorative scent, and then she just moistened his lips with the brandy and water. The light from her room fell full on him. She saw that he was young ; not a boy, but certainly young ; she also noticed he was in the Flying Corps. He must have met with a nasty accident because there were dark stains on his tunic which Angela, with a shiver, felt were blood stains. His condition alarmed her, but just as her burden was becoming very heavy and her knees were

trembling, and her longing for some one to come and help her was getting acute, her patient opened his eyes.

"Was that brandy?" he asked.

She picked up the glass.

"Yes; please drink some."

He obeyed her, and then closed his eyes again, but not for long; almost before she realized what he was doing, he had scrambled and staggered to his feet. Angela got up hurriedly, convinced he would fall; but he did not fall, he sat down heavily on a chair near by.

"I—I'm most frightfully sorry," he said. "I'd no idea——"

"Finish this," Angela answered, and she held out the glass again. He drank the remainder of the stimulant and it seemed to revive him.

"I say," he said, though his voice was shaky, "I don't know how to thank you. I must have pretty nearly frightened you out of your wits, and you've been so plucky."

"I'm afraid I haven't done very much, but now I'll go and see if I can find——"

He caught her by the wrist as she was moving away.

"No—no—please, I beg of you, don't call anybody. . . . I mustn't on any account let Lady Bettina know I'm here. . . . I—I know," he said a little feebly, "it sounds rather queer, but . . . I'm all right. . . . I'm on a secret mission from France with Edward Storrington and only came in here to rest a little. . . . I have to meet Storrington early in the morning. We are flying back to France. . . ."

Angela had listened to him nervously, the grip of his fingers on her wrist had awakened a certain perturbation, but his last words steadied her. She stared at him.

"But . . . you can't go . . . why, you are not fit to move! I'm sure you've got a high temperature. You ought to be in bed."

"I'm going back to France to-morrow," he said doggedly. "I only came to Peniston to see one person, and if you will add to your kindness and *not* rouse the house you will make me your debtor for life. It's a beastly shame to have given

you such a shock. . . . I didn't mean to give myself away, but I felt so dreadfully dicky I just had to. . . . It's this confounded left arm."

He cradled it in his right hand as he spoke, and Angela gave an exclamation of horror as the light from her bedroom fell on the swollen helpless hand hanging limply from the arm.

"Oh! it must be hurting you most dreadfully. Oh! what can I do? . . . Won't you let me get some one—a servant——"

"Honestly," he answered, "you would land me in no end of trouble. I must get away from here unnoticed if I can, but"—he laughed faintly—"if you have something that I could use as a sling?"

"A sling. Why of course, I've got the very thing."

She hurried into the room, to the chest of drawers, and was back almost at once with a brown motor veil which her sister Honor had lent her. It was both long and strong.

"You certainly ought to let a doctor see your arm at once," she said as she flung the scarf over his head after she had knotted it, and then gradually he managed, not without wincing, to draw the injured arm through the wide loop.

"I'm going to find one when I reach town."

"Will you have some more brandy?" Angela asked timidly. He sat so still and looked so white she thought he was going to collapse again. But he had not fainted for he smiled up at her.

"Well, I don't think so; it may go to my head. I have a goodish way to go, and as I haven't eaten any food for hours, I——"

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Angela. "Oh! I do wish you would let me try to get some one. You *must* have food, you know."

"It's wonderful what one can do without if one can't get what one wants. . . . I'm all right. I feel another man, thanks to you."

Angela had been thinking quickly.

"Wait a bit," she said. "I've got something." She

darted to and fro like a bird. "Some milk chocolate," she said triumphantly, returning with a flat package. "I bought it at the station to eat in the train, and then I forgot it . . . I *am* glad! Chocolate is really food, you know," she added; "it's very sustaining."

He thanked quietly.

"I wish I could do something for that hand," the girl said regretfully. "I've got a bottle of Pond's with me. If I could bathe it with some hot water."

He was smiling at her.

She was absolutely at her ease now, speaking, moving, expressing herself naturally.

"I think you've done quite enough," he said.

"Well, if you won't take the Pond's Extract, you must take the brandy. Look, there is still some in the bottle."

"But I shall be spoiling your dressing-case."

"It isn't mine," Angela said simply; "it belongs to my mother, and I know *she* will understand. You won't mind if I tell her about having helped you to-night, will you? Mother is so wonderful; she can always keep a secret."

"What is your name?" he asked her abruptly.

She told him who she was, and then she explained why she was staying at Peniston Court.

He frowned a little.

"Surely they could have found a different room for you? Storrington told me no one was ever put in his room unless they had a big crowd, and then it would only be given to a man. He said I was to make myself at home as I did. But," he added, "I won't grumble, for I've had great good luck in meeting you. Well, now I'm going to get away. Oh!" he paused as he began to move towards the long window through which he had entered the workshop. "My name is Wynstaye—Derrick Wynstaye. . . . I'm carrying off a lot of your property, but if you will be so good as to let me have your address in London, I will get them back to you; that is, I will return the scarf and the bottle, but I am going to eat all the chocolate."

She looked at him doubtfully.

"Are you quite sure you like milk chocolate?"

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"I adore it!" he answered. "Now, Miss Fayne, please go into your room and shut and lock the door again. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye," said Angela, "and good luck; please do go to a doctor as soon as you can."

She closed the door almost reluctantly, but she turned the key in the lock as he had ordered her, and then she stood leaning against it, listening.

It was a few seconds before she heard anything, then she caught the sound of a click as he shut the window behind him, and after that she heard some faint steps on the flags outside, and then, though she strained her ears, she could hear nothing but the soughing of the trees in the gardens beyond. With a little catching sigh Angela went to the fire and sat down in the arm-chair.

Suddenly she felt dazed and even excited; which was only natural considering that she had just gone through a very unusual experience. In time it had lasted only a few moments, but it seemed to her that something very wonderful had been swept into her life in those few moments. At least she knew perfectly well that for days, perhaps months to come, she would never be able to get out of her memory the vivid recollection of the man who had just left her.

There was also interwoven into these acute recollections a curious sense of having been brought into contact with one who, though an absolute stranger to her, had yet passed in some vague and intangible manner through her thoughts, claiming her pity, rousing her indignation against some one who had done him an injury.

She passed her hand over her eyes as she pulled back the chair from the doorway and sat down in front of the fire.

Perhaps she had dreamed about him? Sometimes she did dream very vivid dreams; or perhaps some one who knew them had spoken about him? She heard so many stories of sadness, of marvellous courage, and of wonderful doings these days that her mind was just in the right condition to take strange impressions. In fact Angela had shown almost from the beginning of the war an extraordinary personal interest in the stirring movements of the day;

extraordinary because, though the older members of this generation were naturally influenced and impressed, it was just as natural that taking them *en masse* the younger people became not exactly callous, but at least in a sense indifferent to the catastrophic conditions which the terrible war had brought about.

Mrs. Fayne had in truth more than once troubled herself about the effect which present conditions had upon Angela.

By nature the girl was so sunny, so full of spring-like youth and happiness, that it troubled the mother when she saw the girl sitting brooding as she did so often over the horrors described in the newspapers, and when she knew that in secret the girl wept bitter tears for the maimed and suffering creatures to whom she ministered in those hours she devoted to hospital work.

Hence it seemed to Angela almost a reasonable supposition that she should in some outside way have been brought in contact with the life-story of this man whom she had met so strangely and whom perhaps she would never see again.

One thing was very certain. She might, and probably would, slip out of his memory, but he would never be forgotten. Indeed long after she was undressed and had gone to bed she lay thinking about him, wondering how he was faring, whether his strength would hold out till he reached his destination where he was to meet his friend, how he would endure the flight across the Channel back to France, what indeed lay in the immediate future for him ; and when at last she dropped into sleep she dreamt about him, and was still dreaming when the maid came in with an early cup of tea.

For the first time in her life Angela chose to have her breakfast in her room.

She wanted to have a little time in which to conquer all nervousness connected with her strange meeting with Derrick Wynstaye.

She jumped, of course, to the conclusion that he must be well known to the Storrington family, since he was such an intimate friend of Edward Storrington's ; and as this was

the first big secret imposed on her she felt it almost as a burden. So she grasped at the opportunity of making herself accustomed to that burden. Apart from which she really was very tired, for she had lain awake for so many hours, and fear in the first place and excitement in the second now produced a sort of languor quite unusual with her.

Fortunately, she learnt from the maid that very few of the guests would appear at the breakfast-table, and when she found that it was almost expected of her to have her breakfast in her room she accepted the position eagerly.

After she had taken her bath and was dressed she ventured to open the door that led into the workshop. There was no sign of its having been so recently occupied, nothing to mark either his coming or his going. In the broad daylight too it seemed almost impossible to realize that such a dramatic little episode had been enacted there only a few short hours before.

As she went back to her bedroom and closed and locked the door again it was natural enough that Angela should begin to wonder why he had come to the house in this secretive fashion.

Of course she recognized that in refusing to let her ring for help he had doubtless been actuated by delicacy of thought for herself, but it was certainly evident that he had not wanted to be seen. At the same time, since Edward Storrington not only knew of his intention to visit Peniston Court, but had placed his rooms at Mr. Wynstaye's disposal, it seemed a little strange to Angela that he should have desired to creep away in the middle of the night without rest or refreshment.

And then she suddenly remembered that speech he had made to her in which he had said—

"I only came to Peniston to see one person."

It was certainly no business of hers, but Angela could not resist a little natural curiosity as to who that one person might be. Evidently it was some one in the house, some one whom she had met the night before.

Perhaps it was Blanche Storrington!

This idea was quickly rejected. Somehow or other, though she was young and fairly good-looking, Angela could not reconcile romance with Miss Storrington.

And undoubtedly there had been a suggestion of romance about Derrick Wynstaye.

Had he come, she mused on, to see one of the men staying in the house he would scarcely have adopted this mysterious method of visiting Peniston Court.

And then suddenly, like a flash of lightning, she guessed the truth.

With cheeks hot with colour and a quickly beating heart, she found and opened her small jewel-box, a very modest little affair, and extracted that letter she had hidden away. She did not read it again—she felt she could not do this—but she glanced at the initial scribbled by way of signature. This initial was the letter "D." Angela had not really needed this to confirm her in the impulsive theory which had suddenly rushed into her mind. She knew now that it was Derrick Wynstaye who had written that letter. She knew now the identity of the person he had sought. She remembered all at once that Miss Lessingham had been absent for some time while she had been at the piano playing ragtimes. They must have met out in the wind and rain.

The girl suddenly sat down and crushed that letter in her hand.

The night before she had given him pity because his physical condition had drawn this from her, now her pity was threefold greater.

She had a longing to pack her things and to get away from Peniston—away from all chance of meeting Patricia Lessingham again—as quickly as possible.

Angela was so young, such a child where worldly wisdom, subtlety, or social tact was concerned, that she doubted herself.

At all hazards she must not let Miss Lessingham guess that she had played an unexpected rôle in a matter at once so private and so personal. But would she be able to go through the next few days, brought into close contact with

Patricia Lessingham, and maintain an unconcerned and indifferent attitude?

A knock at the door disturbed Angela.

She put back the paper she had crumpled in her hand so passionately into her jewel-box and locked it securely.

But she was trembling just a little as the maid came in bearing a letter.

"This came for you early this morning, miss," the housemaid said, "but it was unfortunately carried to her ladyship's room. She has just found it among her letters, and my lady wants me to tell you she is so sorry it was not brought up on your breakfast-tray."

The moment Angela looked at the envelope she felt better. It was from her mother, who must have sat down and written very soon after Angela had left the house the day before.

Mrs. Fayne's letters were always treasured by Angela.

On this occasion the sight of her mother's handwriting did more than give pleasure to the girl, it acted as a stimulant; and after she had scanned through the four pages of loving words and gentle counsel she felt just as if she had talked to her mother, confided all her troubles, and been comforted.

"I shan't write anything to her; I shall wait till I go home. Maud would be sure to want to see my letter."

And this made Angela laugh. She could so well picture the horror of her elder sister if she were to know of the very unconventional incidents of the night before.

"Besides," the girl mused on, "I've got to remember this must not be told to anybody but mother."

After she had read through her letter a second time Angela felt quite equal to going downstairs, even if she had to meet Miss Lessingham the moment she arrived in the hall.

As a matter of fact she found no one except a footman, who was attending to the fire.

So she went upstairs again, put on her hat and coat, and as the long window of her bedroom was now open she passed out into the garden that way.

Just to satisfy a little craving, she walked in the direction of the entrance-gates, measuring in her own mind as she went each step he must have taken the night before.

One thing this walk made certain, and that was that Derrick Wynstaye had accomplished the first part of his return journey, for the way out of the ground was not overlong, and once he had reached the high road he might have been able to take it fairly easy, since the danger of having been seen or recognized would have been overcome. Nevertheless, she worried about him. She wondered if he had been able to reach any place where he had been properly attended to. She could not bear to think of him walking miles in the darkness with that aching and swollen hand and arm ; the idea that he would cross the Channel without first having had medical attention seemed to Angela that he would be called upon to bear almost unendurable pain. And yet she convinced herself that he would surmount all obstacles, that no matter what it cost him he would meet his friend at the time arranged upon, and that possibly at that very moment he was being carried away swiftly from England and all it meant to him, back to the turmoil, the business, the tragedy and the chance of war.

CHAPTER VIII

ANGELA felt all the better for her walk, and she found it therefore comparatively easy to meet Miss Lessingham when everybody arrived for lunch.

The party was not so large as it had been the night before, for Colonel Quaine and one or two other men had their duties to attend to.

Richard Bosworth too was absent. It transpired that he had been called to London for a medical board. His sister was openly worried about him.

"Of course they can't possibly send him back in his present condition," she said; "but you know what Dicky is. He is so eager to be in it again." She addressed herself to no one in particular, but Lady Bettina answered her.

"Oh, surely there is no possibility of dear Dick being sent back to France just yet awhile!"

Miss Lessingham said nothing. She seemed bored or else tired.

After luncheon, to Angela's great surprise, she addressed herself to the girl.

"Come and sit down here with me. I want to talk to you about your sister. Why didn't you tell me she was your sister?"

"I don't know," answered Angela in her frank way. "I didn't think it would interest you."

Miss Lessingham struck a match and lit a cigarette.

"That's all nonsense!" she said. "You are perfectly well aware that everybody must be interested in Mrs. Bellares. I think she is one of the most fascinating creatures I have ever met; and then she is so clever."

Angela flushed prettily. It always rejoiced her to hear her sister Honor praised and appreciated. Though she was no nearer liking Patricia Lessingham, she could not be proof against this warmth of interest in one so dear to her.

"Have you seen my portrait?" was Miss Lessingham's next query.

Angela said—

"Yes"; asking in her turn, "Do you like it? Are you satisfied with it?"

Patricia Lessingham smiled.

"If I am half as nice as that picture makes me I think I ought to be very well satisfied. I understand that Mrs. Bellares is going to exhibit it. I hope it will bring her a lot of commissions; but I expect she has plenty already."

"I don't want her to do too much," said Angela quickly. "She loves her painting; but sometimes she seems to devote too much time to it, she gets so tired. I know," the girl went on, "she only works like this because she tries to forget."

"Ah," said the other, "it is a great mistake to be born with a heart, at least with a sensitive one." Then she turned round and looked at Angela. "And you?" she asked. "Are you an artist? Of course I know you sing, but have you any other accomplishments?"

"Not of a creative nature," said Angela. "I can do all sorts of little parlour tricks, like most girls, but nothing that I do really counts."

A little gleam came into Patricia Lessingham's eyes.

"Don't depreciate yourself, my dear," she said. "It is a great mistake. There will always be some one ready to do that for you, and, though you may not think a great deal of yourself or of your singing, I can tell you that it is very good! In fact, to be frank with you, you surprised me. I am something of a critic. I have travelled so much. I have heard so many people, and then I am by nature critically inclined. At least, I am not very easily pleased; but your singing charmed me last night."

There was just a little touch of patronage in the gracious words.

Angela felt it at once, and instantly it brought back to her with a rush her original feeling of instinctive dislike for this woman.

It was with relief that she felt herself dismissed as Miss

Lessingham rose and with a little nod sauntered away.

The rest of the day and evening passed uneventfully but very pleasantly.

Captain Bosworth did not return from London. Instead a car came down, bringing a box of lovely flowers for Miss Lessingham and a letter, and also a note for Mrs. Chatfield.

It appeared that his " board " had been postponed till the next day. He sent a message to Angela.

" Please tell Miss Fayne," he scribbled to his sister, " that I am going to make a terrific effort to be down in time for the concert, but if I'm not lucky enough to be at the first one I shall certainly be there for the second."

Angela accepted the message with a little thrill of pleasure. She liked him so much, and she told his sister so quite simply and frankly.

Mrs. Chatfield gave a little sigh as she folded up the letter.

" Yes, Dicky is a dear," she said. " He seems more to me now than he used to be. That is because I have no children of my own, I suppose, and he is so much younger than I am. He has always been a great responsibility and anxiety to me because, although he is so splendid in some ways, he is very weak in others, and I am so afraid lest he should just miss out his happiness. Of course life isn't what it used to be," she went on. " One can't make plans or look ahead as in the old days, and our boys have to take their chances of being knocked out or maimed or otherwise changed. Still I have always felt that Dicky will be such a fine husband if he marries the right sort of girl ! "

She had spoken almost as if she had uttered her thoughts unconsciously, and then she pulled herself up rather sharply.

Angela sat chatting with Mrs. Chatfield for some time that evening. They made great progress towards frie ndship and parted with the mutual desire to see as much of one another in the future as possible.

" You must come and stay with me," Magna Chatfield said, " though I'm not very often in the country now. Whenever I get a chance or think I have a chance of seeing

my husband I rush up north. He has scarcely had a day's leave since war broke out. But sometimes his ship has to come in to be refitted, and then I do get a glimpse of him. I haven't seen him now for some months."

Just then Miss Storrington came up and sat near them.

"I have just had a letter from Ted," she said. "Imagine, he was over in England yesterday! Flew over on some important matter or mission."

Mrs. Chatfield uttered an exclamation.

"Isn't Lady Bettina excited?"

Blanche Storrington shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, Ted isn't coming here! He left for France again this morning. I am not going to tell mother anything about this," she added; "she would fret so much if she thought Ted had been over and had not come down to see her!"

"I suppose that was impossible, Blanche?"

"Apparently. Ted is not very communicative, but he does tell me that he had Derrick Wynstaye with him and that in landing they had a smash up and that Mr. Wynstaye was so much hurt that he has had to be left behind, much to his disgust. He seems to have actually fought to be taken back, but he was in such a condition that Ted thought it wiser to report him, and so he has gone to a hospital."

Angela had coloured hotly during this speech, but neither of the other women was looking at her, so this was not observed.

Her heart began to beat very unevenly however as she saw Miss Lessingham coming towards them. She dreaded what would come.

"You are all looking very solemn," observed the newcomer. "Has anything happened?"

"Evidently we are not good conspirators," remarked Miss Storrington, "because," she explained, "I was just telling Magna and Miss Fayne that I had had a few lines from Ted." She then repeated what she had said to the other two, and Angela felt herself looking at Patricia Lessingham closely, eagerly.

It might have been her imagination, but she thought she saw the beautiful face contract and the lips tighten; never-

theless, Miss Lessingham had herself well under control.

"I am perfectly convinced Derrick Wynstaye must be furious," she said. "He is so keen on his job."

"Well, you are quite right not to tell your mother, Blanche, about this flying visit," Mrs. Chatfield observed. "Dick was only saying to me yesterday how much she was longing to see your brother."

"Yes," said Blanche Storrington, getting up from her chair and yawning slightly, "she is so prepared to have him arrive at any moment that she has given strict orders that his workshop windows are never to be locked or shut, so that he can let himself in at any time. I don't know why she should expect that he should arrive in the middle of the night or without giving us due warning, but——" She finished with a shrug of her shoulders.

And Mrs. Chatfield answered softly—

"Yes, mothers are queer creatures in some ways."

Angela's heart was now beating again very quickly, and she felt nervous as to what would follow. As a matter of fact, at that very moment Miss Storrington turned to her.

"I say, I do hope that you won't be frightened or nervous, Miss Fayne! The workshop joins your bedroom, as I think I told you, but the door between is locked, so there is no need for you to be frightened; but if you are I will at once change your room."

Angela shook her head at this.

"Oh—oh, no! Thanks ever so much! I'm not nervous; indeed I'm very comfortable"; and then she added with a little laugh, "I believe I shall say 'Good night,' if I may. I'm rather sleepy. I think it must be the country air."

She gave a little nod to them all and flitted away.

Mrs. Chatfield expressed her admiration warmly.

"That's an awfully nice girl—a pretty one too!"

"She isn't a patch on her sister," said Miss Lessingham in her semi-languid manner. "I call Honor Bellares quite lovely. You admire her too, don't you, Blanche?"

Miss Storrington pursed up her lips.

"Yes—oh, yes, although I really prefer something more

substantial! Mrs. Bellares looks like a spirit, and then she gets a little on my nerves, she is so sad."

"It is so stupid of a woman to be unhappy when she has lost her husband in the first year of their marriage," said Mrs. Chatfield dryly. Then she added, "I suppose your brother did not say what hospital Mr. Wynstaye had gone to? I should like to make inquiries about him. I like Derrick Wynstaye." She turned suddenly to Miss Lessingham. "You used to be great friends with Derrick. Have you heard anything of him lately?"

"Oh, he writes sometimes!" said Patricia Lessingham. "He seems to be rather unlucky," she added, with a little laugh, "for the last time I heard from him he had hurt himself. Well," she added, "I think I shall follow Miss Fayne's example. I am going to take this book with me, Blanche. I hope you don't mind?"

"What is it?" Miss Storrington answered, and she glanced at the title. "Oh, yes, my dear, you can have that with the greatest pleasure! I tried to read it, but I couldn't get through the first four pages. I like something thrilling. Give me the serial in the *Morning Delivery*. That's my style of literature. Are you going to bed too, Magna?"

Mrs. Chatfield nodded her head.

"Yes." She was looking a little pale and stern, and when she mounted the stairs and was alone in her room she took from the mantelpiece her brother's photograph.

"Oh, my dear," she said, speaking to the picture as though it were alive, "if only I could take the veil from your eyes! If only I could stand between you and the big mistake you are going to make!"

CHAPTER IX

THE next few days passed very quickly and pleasantly for Angela.

Lady Bettina's two entertainments went off with great éclat, and "little Miss Fayne" scored a great personal success.

"I am afraid," Angela scribbled to her mother, "that my head will get so swollen you will have to widen the doors for me when I get home! Honestly, you darling thing, I have done ever so much better than I expected to. I was very nervous to start with, but the soldiers make such a splendid audience. I wish you could have heard them cheer at the end! And I do wish you could have been here with me, my precious mother! Lady Bettina wants me to stay on another week to take part in another entertainment which is being arranged at a neighbouring house. I am now enjoying myself very much indeed; at the same time I feel I have had a very long holiday, and I'm simply dying to see you again, because I always feel happier when I can satisfy myself that you are being taken care of. So, dearest, if you want me back, I beg of you to send a telegram at once. I'm still a little terrified of Blanche Storrington, but I get on splendidly with Lady Bettina."

At the same time that this letter was sent Angela wrote one to her sister Honor.

"Thank you, dear one, for writing me so often. You know how I adore hearing from you. I'm glad you've sent the portrait in to the exhibition; and I hope now you are going to have a little rest. Who do you think turned up here yesterday to dine and sleep? Rex Rayburn! He went away first thing this morning. Of course we talked a tremendous lot about you and little Christopher. I do like

him, Honor. I think he's really the nicest man I know. He is a great friend of Captain Bosworth, who is going to marry Miss Lessingham. Their engagement was announced only last night. Everybody is making a great fuss about them. He is delightfully shy, but she takes it all as a matter of course. Captain Bosworth's sister, Mrs. Chatfield, left here in a great hurry yesterday morning, rushing up to Scotland to see her husband, so she doesn't know yet about the engagement. I wonder if she will be glad? She simply adores Captain Bosworth. Now, my precious, I must shut up or else I shall be late for dinner."

Mrs. Fayne answered Angela's letter by telephone.

It was delightful to the girl to hear her mother's voice, even at a distance.

"Of course you must stay on, my darling," the mother said. "Your father and I are so glad that you should have this change. And now be sure and let me know, Angela, if you want anything?"

"Of course, I don't want anything," Angela answered. "I haven't spent half the money Honor gave me—there's nothing to spend money on down here! But are you sure you can do without me?"

Her mother laughed as she said—

"Quite sure, although, you know, I miss my baby, but father is taking care of me. I am not doing much work just for a few days, and I'm having my breakfast in bed every morning!" Then Mrs. Fayne gave Angela various bits of news, and when the telephone operator cut them off, the girl felt all the better for having had that little chat with her mother.

The day was wet, a heavy soaking rain, so, instead of wandering about the grounds and the country as she loved to do, Angela made her way to the deserted drawing-room and sat down to the piano. There was a clear hour before luncheon, and she sang through all her songs several times. The door opened once and she glanced round, but it was only the footman to attend to the fire, and so she continued to practise.

She was singing one of her favourite French songs when the door was opened a second time, so softly however that Angela did not hear some one come in and slip himself in a corner chair. This some one was a young man in the inevitable khaki, with his arm in a sling. His face, pale beneath the tan, and a little stern, softened as he listened, and there came into his eyes an expression of intense pleasure.

Angela's voice was fresh and sweet and full ; sometimes there was a thrush-like sound in her notes, at others a quality which thrilled her hearers and even brought lumps into their throats.

She got up at last and closed the piano, rubbing her hands, for the big room was rather chilly ; and as she moved towards the fire to warm herself she suddenly caught sight of the young man sitting in the corner, and she stopped short.

She made the prettiest picture imaginable as she stood there. She wore a white fleecy sports-coat over her silk blouse, and the firelight shed a glow on her beautiful hair.

As she recognized Mr. Wynstaye she caught her breath sharply and said "Oh!" in a half-frightened tone, and then she coloured hotly.

He got up and came towards her.

"How do you do?" he asked. "I hope you didn't mind my coming in and listening to you, Miss Fayne? I heard sounds of singing when I was in the hall by myself, and I simply had to come. I adore music! You can't imagine how much I have enjoyed hearing you sing."

Angela recovered herself with a little effort.

"Oh, of course I don't mind! I—it was stupid of me, but I never heard you come in, and you startled me." She caught her breath a little, and then she said half nervously, "I did not know that you were expected. Are you—are you staying here?"

Even while she put this question to him she was remembering with a little thrill of relief that Miss Lessingham would not be in for luncheon. Captain Bosworth had arranged to take her in his car to have luncheon with some friends of his, who lived some distance away.

Wynstaye noticed her little hesitation. He had of course no clue as to what was passing through her mind, but attributed her constraint to a very natural feeling of shyness.

" Yes, I have come down here for a time. Lady Bettina insisted on my doing so. I've got leave for a fortnight or three weeks, and left hospital yesterday. It was awfully good of Lady Bettina to take me in. I suppose Ted must have told her where to find me," he said, speaking on quite easily, being desirous of putting the girl at her ease, a fact which Angela at once recognized gratefully. " Have you met Storrington ? " he asked.

They were standing in front of the fire now, and Angela was stretching her hands towards it.

She had not dared to look at him after the first glance, but she was cognisant none the less of the fact not merely that he seemed cheerful—which was very astonishing—but that he was decidedly attractive.

Indeed she marvelled, in a sense, that she had recognized him so quickly. He looked so different.

Angela answered Mr. Wynstaye quickly.

" No ! " she said. " Mr. Storrington has not been here since I came down. In fact I never met Lady Bettina or her daughter before this visit. I came through Miss Masson's introduction. Do you know her ? "

" I have met her," Wynstaye answered. " Of course I know of her. She is an awfully nice girl, isn't she ? "

He talked on in this way because he wanted to encourage Angela to become absolutely at her ease, and he succeeded.

There was scarcely a trace of nervousness in her voice as she spoke on about her friend.

" Oh, yes, Theo Masson is a dear ! I like her so much ! She is the head orderly where I am working. But won't you sit down ? I am sure you ought not to stand, remember you have just come out of hospital ! "

" As a matter of fact I am a fraud ! " Derrick Wynstaye said, with a laugh, " for I feel almost fit ! I shall get the use of my hand and arm in another few days. I hate being idle ! " he added.

He had waited till Angela had seated herself, and now pulled forward a chair. There was a little silence between them—a silence which he translated very shrewdly.

" I don't suppose you expected to see me here," he said to her abruptly, and while he spoke he was thinking he had never seen anything prettier than Angela looked with the fire glow throwing up the lights and colour in her wonderful hair. She did not appeal to him in the sense that many another woman had done ; he was remembering her as he had last seen her ; her warm-blooded sympathy, her eagerness to help, her simple manners, and her undoubted anxiety on his behalf had made a little memory which had lingered vividly with him, and now that he saw her in the flesh again he realized how young she was, how different to the type of woman with whom he had mingled of late, especially to that one who for so long had held him bound body and soul as it were with some subtle spell.

As she coloured hotly and turned in rather a startled fashion towards him he felt sorry that he had spoken.

Angela answered him almost in an involuntary fashion.

" I have not thought about it at all."

He smiled at her simple straightforward answer.

" Well, I'm very glad to see you again ; and, by the way, I have got your little bottle and scarf you lent me. I rather hate giving up the scarf, for I must have a little souvenir of you. Do you know," he added, " when Lady Bettina was good enough to ask me down here, I accepted almost entirely because I hoped that I might get a glimpse of you before you left Peniston Court."

The flush lingered in Angela's cheeks.

" Really ! " she said. " How—how very nice of you ! But "—she gave a little shrug of her shoulders—" I don't think I did very much for you—nothing more than anybody else would have done."

" Oh, didn't you ? " he answered. " Well, I can tell you that heaps of girls would have made an awful scene, roused the house, and upset everybody."

Angela laughed.

" Well, it's no use denying it, I *was* frightened," she said.

"When I heard you moving about in that room, I—well, I hardly know what I did think! You see, it is rather a lonely part of the house. Miss Storrington told me that she was very sorry to put me there, but that there was such a run on the bedrooms for the concert that I suppose there was no other place. She has offered to move me since then, but I preferred to stay where I am."

"You are not going away just yet?"

"No; I am staying for another concert. I have just been speaking to my mother on the telephone. I thought I ought to go home, but she wants me to stay on."

"I hope you won't go while I am here!" said Derrick Wynstaye.

He said this warmly, and the warmth was sincere.

At the same time, had he been the man he was a few months before, he would have realized, that he was deliberately setting himself to play a part and to use this girl rather ignobly in the furtherance of a game which he was resolved to carry through to the bitter end.

It is just possible too that he may have misjudged Angela.

Life had put into him of late a certain amount of cynicism; circumstances had helped that cynicism to fructify.

Of course she looked very young; there was something very disarming about her simplicity, just as she was undeniably pretty and attractive. But no doubt, so he said to himself, all these things were just a garment to cover worldly knowledge and that subtlety and double dealing which he was now beginning to assure himself existed in every woman's nature.

To Angela he was delightful. He had such a charm of manner; he was so good-looking; and these things in themselves would have attracted her naturally. And when to these was added the fact that a secret in a sense existed between them, the impression this man made on her can be easily imagined. And then again the sight of him, evidently well on the road to recovery and as evidently in good spirits, took from her that sense of anxiety which had mingled in with her remembrance of him.

She even began to doubt as they sat there chatting so

happily together whether her first conclusion had been the right one. After all, she told herself, she really had so little to go upon; only her woman's intuition which had led her to credit him with being the author of that letter which had fallen so strangely into her hands, and to weave from that a big romance.

There was certainly nothing tragic about him to-day. That memorable night when she had unlocked the door and had looked upon him for the first time it had been easy enough to conjure up all sorts of stories in connexion with his curious and secret visit to Peniston Court.

But, after all, it had been rather foolish of her to have jumped so quickly to the conviction that it was Patricia Lessingham who had brought him there!

In this it had certainly been a case of putting two and two together and coming to an imaginative conclusion.

Angela argued all this to herself swiftly as they sat talking, and by the time the door opened and Lady Bettina came bustling in she had settled in her own mind that she had been very much mistaken and that the letter which she had hidden away in her jewel-box, even though it was signed by the initial "D.," had really no connexion with Mr. Wynstaye. As to why he should have come to the house and whom the one person might be whom he had alone desired to see, Angela troubled herself not in the least now.

As she ran up to her room just before luncheon she felt her heart rising lightly in her breast, and as she glanced at herself in the mirror she smiled at her reflection.

No doubt it was very stupid of her, but she could not help being extraordinarily relieved to arrive at the conclusion that it really would not matter to Mr. Wynstaye one way or another what Patricia Lessingham did, and that the news of her engagement to Richard Bosworth would be regarded by him with casual interest.

A few minutes later, as she went downstairs again to take her place at the luncheon-table, she found herself confessing that she was very pleased that her mother had urged her to remain at Peniston Court another week.

CHAPTER X

MRS. CHATFIELD was only away a few days. It is possible that she might not have returned to Peniston if her brother had not written to her and informed her of his engagement to Miss Lessingham and of their intention to marry with as little delay as possible.

"Lady Bettina has insisted upon us staying here with her till the beginning of next week. As there is nothing to keep you in Scotland now I hope you'll come back here. Somehow, although you and Pat have met so often, I never feel that you have had a chance to grow to know one another as well as I want you to. It was ripping for you to have had a couple of days with George, and I'm so glad to hear the dear old chap is looking so fit. I only wish that his ship might have been obliged to stay in dock for a week or two; but cheer up, old girl, there's a good time coming for all of us, and George is sure to cover himself with glory before he has finished!"

Had she yielded to her own feelings Magna Chatfield would certainly not have come into immediate contact with her brother's fiancée; but she could not refuse him, and she travelled south with the full intention of doing her share to arrive at a more sympathetic understanding with the beautiful young woman who was to be his wife. She buried many hopes on that journey—somehow to the very last she had cherished the belief that Patricia Lessingham might change her mind or that some other and more brilliant future for her might crop up unexpectedly.

That Miss Lessingham was in love with Richard, Mrs. Chatfield did not believe for an instant, because she went further than that—she told herself it was not possible for Patricia to care for any one but herself.

But she had never shut her eyes to the fact that Richard

possessed, unfortunately, everything in a material sense which appealed to a nature like Patricia's, and there were times when she had actually wished that he might have been a poor man, as then there might have been more prospect of happiness for him.

She found herself wondering impatiently how it was that men were so blind in some cases.

Patricia Lessingham never attempted to hide her real character or nature or disposition—she was selfish, she was exacting, she was cold-blooded, and, though clever in a worldly sense, was not in the least intellectual, yet Richard Bosworth adored her—he could see no blemish in her, he would probably go on blindly worshipping her and endowing her with every sort of good quality, even when common sense and hard facts would have done their best to spoil his romance.

It was a cold day, and Mrs. Chatfield shivered more than once as she drove in the motor from the station to Peniston. With all the best intentions in the world, she knew full well that there never would be any good-fellowship between herself and her brother's future wife.

The aching sense of loneliness that always oppressed her when she parted from her husband was not cheered by the thought of the mistake her brother was about to make, and instead of exerting herself to be charming and to make the best of the situation she felt much more inclined to shut herself up in her room and shed bitter tears.

When she entered Peniston Court Angela was in the hall.

She ran forward to greet Mrs. Chatfield almost excitedly, and the older woman caught her breath as she looked at the girl.

Almost at once her spirits seemed to rise. There was something infectious about the girl's happy youth.

As they kissed one another with real affection Mrs. Chatfield held Angela away from her and looked at her.

"Why, my dear," she said, "what have you done to yourself? You look positively radiant! I suppose you have been having more successes."

"No; the concert is not till to-night," said Angela.

The colour deepened in her cheeks.

" I'm so glad to see you again ! " she said. And, though this was the simple truth, she knew that she had prevaricated, for life had suddenly become most wonderful and enchanting to Angela. Grey skies, cold winds, snow, hail, rain—none of these could change the wonderful sunshine which lived in her heart and seemed to be upon her perpetually.

Not that she had as yet even commenced to realize that anything of an unusual nature had come to change the current of her existence. She was simply living as it were in a delicious dream.

Her visit to Peniston Court had been pleasant enough the preceding week, but in the last few days it had been far more enjoyable. Of course she might have reasoned with herself that she had lost her shyness, she had fallen into her proper place, and since her success in the two concerts she had gone up very much in the estimation of Blanche Storrington, who had been perhaps the only one little uncomfortable element calculated to spoil her visit. But, as has just been said, it had not seemed necessary, nor had it dawned in the girl's mind to pause and analyse her feelings. Nevertheless, as she met Mrs. Chatfield and was greeted with the inquiry as to what had happened to her, she suddenly realized, with a little thrill at her heart, that it would be very difficult to explain to this woman, charming as she was, why she looked and was so happy.

But, though she had prevaricated, she was truly glad to see Magna Chatfield again. There was a deep unspoken bond of sympathy and understanding between them.

Mrs. Chatfield reminded Angela at times of her sister Honor, who had always stood to Angela as the one creature who embodied sympathy in the truest sense of the word.

At the new arrival's request she went upstairs with her and sat a little while in the bedroom.

She gave a résumé of all that had happened since Mrs. Chatfield had left, although she delicately avoided speaking of the engagement which had, of course, been announced and

which was still the great topic of interest in the house and in the immediate neighbourhood.

It did Magna Chatfield good to listen to the girl's pretty happy voice.

When her maid had taken her outdoor things and they were alone, standing in front of the fire, she drew Angela towards her and kissed her.

"I have quite lost my heart to you, my dear little person!" she said. "I told my husband all about you, and he sent you many messages. He hopes to see you one of these days. I look forward to seeing a good deal of you, Angela, you know."

"You must come and meet my mother," the girl replied. "I know you would both like one another so much. Of course I should adore staying with you, but"—she shook her head—"I am having such a very long holiday. I really ought not to stay away any longer, although everybody is so very nice about it. Theo Masson declares that she doesn't want me back, but I know that is only because she doesn't want to cut short my visit here, for there is plenty for every one to do at the workrooms, and when I am away I am afraid she does my duties as well as her own."

"Oh, well, a little holiday does nobody any harm, and I am sure you have deserved yours!" Then Mrs. Chatfield asked about the house-party—who had gone and who had come and what was going to happen generally.

As Angela enumerated the various new guests she came, of course, to the name of Derrick Wynstaye.

She was not looking at Mrs. Chatfield, therefore she did not see the quick way in which the older woman's brows contracted.

"Derrick Wynstaye!" she repeated. "I thought he was very ill in hospital."

"Oh, he was in hospital—he came down here the day he was allowed out! Lady Bettina makes a great fuss of him," said Angela. "Blanche Storrington says it is because he is such a great friend of her son's, but I think it is because she likes him for himself too."

"Most people like Derrick Wynstaye," said Mrs. Chat-

field. "He is so very attractive. I'd no idea that he would be staying here," she added in the same breath.

Angela looked at her.

"Is there any reason why he shouldn't come to Penis-ton?"

Magna Chatfield shook her head.

"Oh, dear, no! Only, as I told you just now, I thought he was in hospital."

"He won't be here much longer," said Angela. "He is simply craving to get back to the front. There is some wonderful new machine which he is dying to try."

"I hope he won't go back too soon," said Mrs. Chatfield.

Though she did not appear to be looking at Angela, she was noticing every expression in the girl's face, and something that she saw there written gave her a little passing pang.

It struck Magna Chatfield as being pathetic as well as natural that this young creature to whom she was drawn so surely should so quickly have fallen under the power of that attraction which Derrick Wynstaye most indubitably possessed. It might possibly be nothing more than a passing impression—just one of those little natural and agreeable interludes which come into the life of most young people at some time or another; but Mrs. Chatfield did not like the combination of Wynstaye and Patricia Lessingham being guests in the same house, especially at such a time as this. She did not for an instant imagine that Mr. Wynstaye's presence would inconvenience Miss Lessingham, nor that it would influence her with regard to her marriage. Had Wynstaye possessed what Richard Bosworth could call his own, things might have been very different, but undoubtedly, though the woman might carry off the situation lightly and prove even indifferent to the gossip which must be circulating briskly, it might be a very different matter where the young man was concerned.

Mrs. Chatfield happened both to know and to like Derrick Wynstaye very well—he was, in fact, one of her favourites, and remembering his infatuation for Patricia, it struck her as being a most extraordinary thing that Wynstaye should

choose to be a guest at Peniston at the very moment when this woman whom he had so openly loved was engaged to be married to another man. And in the same way it seemed to her most unfortunate that Angela Fayne should have been brought in contact with him just at this very time.

As she had said to Angela, she had grown quite fond of the girl, and she resolved now that she would make it her business to keep an eye on what was passing and to do all in her power to stand between this young unworldly creature and any real trouble which might accrue from what was undoubtedly a very dangerous situation.

Captain Bosworth knocked at her bedroom door while Angela was still with her. He came in in splendid spirits. His arm was now out of the sling and he professed to be able to use it almost freely. As she saw the brother and sister embrace and begin to talk eagerly, Angela, with a little bright nod, went and left them together.

She was humming to herself as she made her way to that part of the house where her own room was, when she came upon Miss Lessingham. Captain Bosworth's fiancée was still in her furs. She had come in from a long motor excursion with Bosworth.

Angela was passing her with a smile and a nod, when Miss Lessingham stopped her.

"I suppose you don't feel a bit nervous about to-night?" she queried.

Angela answered promptly—

"Oh, yes, indeed I do! I am always nervous when I get up on a platform. I feel so small and my voice seems so insignificant."

"Oh, you are too modest, my dear! What are you going to sing?"

"I am going to repeat the songs I sang last time. Lady Bettina wishes me to do so. I only wish the concert was going to take place here. I begin to feel almost at home at Peniston."

"Yes, you make friends very quickly," said Miss Lessing-

ham. "For instance, you and Mr. Wynstaye seem to get along famously together. Do you know how long he is going to stay?"

Angela shook her head.

"No; I suppose another few days. He is going back to France as soon as he possibly can."

"I met a friend of his this afternoon," said Miss Lessingham, "and I was entrusted with a little note for Mr. Wynstaye. I've got a wretched headache, and I'm thinking of staying in my room to-night. I hope you won't think me churlish for not coming to applaud you, Miss Fayne?"

"Of course not!" said Angela. "I'm only sorry you don't feel well."

"Motoring very often gives me a headache," said Miss Lessingham in her languid way, "and it was so cold to-day." She took a letter from her muff. "You are sure to see Mr. Wynstaye when you go down. I wonder if you would give this to him for me?"

Just for an instant Angela paused, hesitating, and then she said—

"Oh, of course! I shan't be downstairs for another half-hour or so. I have to dress."

"Oh, that won't matter!" said Miss Lessingham. "Thanks ever so much!"

She passed on quickly and disappeared along the corridor which led to her room, leaving Angela standing with the note in her hand.

A most curious feeling came into the girl's mind as she stood holding that letter. She had the greatest disinclination to take it.

Suddenly it seemed that something had jarred that wonderful pleasure and contentment which had been with her so thoroughly.

She turned and went up to her own room, and when she reached it she glanced at the writing on the envelope and she realized that Patricia Lessingham had prevaricated.

The letter which she had entrusted to Angela to be given to Derrick Wynstaye could not have come from an outside person since it was addressed in her own handwriting.

CHAPTER XI

AS luck would have it, Angela was seated next to Wynstaye at the dinner-table that night.

Lady Bettina apologized to her guests for having the meal advanced nearly an hour.

"But, you see, my dears," she said, "we've a fairly long drive in front of us, and I promised faithfully we would not be late." Then she addressed Mr. Wynstaye. "Please see that Miss Fayne eats some dinner. I give her into your charge, Mr. Wynstaye!"

"You hear that?" Wynstaye said, turning to Angela.

She had been looking a little pale, but now there was a delightful little flush in her cheeks.

"But you know I am quite capable of taking care of myself," she answered.

"Why rob me of a wonderful pleasure?"

She laughed back at him and made some light remark, but he saw that she was not quite the same, and this puzzled him just a little till she took a letter from her lap and put it on the table beside him.

Then he understood in a sense.

That is to say, he felt quite sure that Patricia Lessingham had managed in some way to send a little cloud over the sunshine which had been so obviously existing in Angela's heart.

Not that he imagined for an instant that Angela would connect him with Patricia in any way, but, looking at this woman with eyes and judgment absolutely cleared now, he realized how easy it would be for such a one to plant little stings in so young and impressionable and sweet a nature as that which Angela Fayne possessed. And of course he was perfectly well aware of the fact that Miss Lessingham was not only extremely annoyed with him for

having come to Peniston, but that she would naturally resent the attentions he had paid to Angela.

She had tried on more than one occasion during the last week to catch him unawares in order to have a few minutes' conversation with him.

This was at least the third or fourth letter which she had sent to his room, but he had taken no notice of her in any way whatever. Of course they had talked when they were with other people. He had congratulated her most charmingly when Lady Bettina had told him of her engagement, and it had given him immense satisfaction to realize that it was in his power to irritate and to annoy Patricia.

Sometimes he had been amazed at himself that his feelings for her had undergone so swift and drastic a change.

And yet when he paused to reflect and look back he saw that she had been preparing the way for this very steadily for some time past, and that that last brief interview between them had swept from him every ideal which he had cherished for so long and so hopelessly, and upon which he had built up so many hopes in the past. His thoughts as he had lain in hospital had been rather of pity for the man whom Patricia was going to marry than of bitterness for herself.

And now it amused him in a cynical and rather heartless fashion to think that it was in his power to reverse the order of things between them.

Not that he believed for one instant that Patricia Lessingham was really capable of suffering, but in these matters there are always degrees.

And he was perfectly well aware that—though no one could have possibly guessed this but himself—that his presence at Peniston Court just at this time was about the most unpleasant thing that could have happened for Miss Lessingham.

Derrick Wynstaye sat looking down at the letter Angela had put on the table, with a strange smile curling his lip. He made no effort to pick it up at once.

"Why, where does this come from?" he asked.

" Miss Lessingham asked me to give it to you. I understood her to say she had seen some friend of yours this afternoon who had sent you a note, and as she was not coming down to dinner she asked me to give it to you."

The tiniest frown gathered on his brow for an instant, but Angela did not see this.

He slipped the letter into a pocket.

" Surely," he said, " there are others who could do Miss Lessingham's errands ? "—and his tone was so hard that Angela looked at him in rather startled fashion.

" I'm sorry if I have annoyed you," she said a little timidly.

He turned quickly, and he put his hand just for an instant on hers.

" You annoy me ! That would be absolutely impossible ! Now, are you eating a proper amount of dinner, Miss Fayne ? Remember I shall have to give an account of my stewardship to Lady Bettina later on. Won't you have a little champagne ? "

She shook her head.

" I never touch wine, and I don't smoke, and I can't play bridge. I'm afraid I am right out of the fashion."

He paid her no compliment, but his silence was eloquent. And once again Angela's heart began to rise and the radiance which Mrs. Chatfield had recognized so quickly began to permeate her being once again.

From where she sat at the table Mrs. Chatfield could not see them very clearly ; but she knew that they were sitting together, and a sense of anger began to rise in her. From quite a different reason she too resented Wynstaye's presence at Peniston just now.

He upset all her plans.

She had so firmly resolved on making the best of a situation which signified much unhappiness to her ; on playing a part and attempting a pretence of good feeling for Patricia, and Derrick Wynstaye was helping to make this impossible.

For how could she shut her eyes to the truth ?

Or how could she pretend, when he was there to remind

her so callously of the real nature of the woman who in so short a time would be her brother's wife?

Mrs. Chatfield had her own explanation for Patricia's absence from the dinner-table.

It made her heart ache, and it enraged her at the same time, to notice how anxious her brother was made by this pretended indisposition. Assuredly he was utterly innocent of the game that was being played, with his money and his future happiness for the stakes.

It was natural that she should think first and foremost for her brother. But in a measure the feelings awakened by her love for him were extended to Angela Fayne. For now she was convinced that what she had only vaguely conjectured was a certain fact, and that Wynstaye would not hesitate to use this girl to suit his own ends.

The anger she felt was not altogether for him. It was directed against Patricia, for undoubtedly the harm she had done to Wynstaye would work out against others.

"Oh! if only I could let Dick know something of the truth," she said to herself miserably, "but to speak plainly would be to make a break between us, and that would kill me!"

Indeed the tears came into her eyes at the mere thought of an estrangement between her brother and herself. Moreover, Mrs. Chatfield looked ahead, and she saw that the time would come when her love and her sympathy might be very necessary to Richard Bosworth.

To stand between Angela and unhappiness she must go to work very tactfully, for she felt that a false move might precipitate that which she was determined to check.

"He has a score to settle with Patricia, that's very certain, but he shall not use this girl to help him if I can stop it!" she said to herself.

So when they all rose from the dinner-table and were gathered in the hall waiting for the motors Mrs. Chatfield slipped her hand through Angela's arm with an affectionate and protecting air which was quite charming to the girl, but the significance of which was not lost upon Derrick Wynstaye.

Just before they started Captain Bosworth came up to his sister, and, after he had exchanged a few words with her, he made a little apology to Angela.

"I say, I hope you won't think me very horrid if I don't go to this concert to-night, Miss Fayne? The fact is I think I'll turn in rather early. My arm is giving me a little trouble to-night. I suppose that's because I would drive the car this afternoon, although Pat told me I ought not to."

"Oh, do rest, Captain Bosworth!" said Angela. "Oh, of course I don't think it horrid! I quite understand. I have been trying to persuade Mr. Wynstaye not to come, it's such a cold night."

It was Wynstaye himself who answered this.

"Ah, but, you see, I'm not allowing myself to be regarded as an invalid! I am also the most obstinate person in the world. I always refused to be advised."

Angela laughed and Mrs. Chatfield made some slight reply, but it seemed to her that already Wynstaye had guessed what was passing through her mind, and this made her slightly uneasy.

There was very little opportunity during the evening for Angela to be left alone with Derrick Wynstaye, she was so much in request. The pianist of the occasion had been taken suddenly ill, and little Miss Fayne was called upon to deputize not only as a soloist, but as an accompanist to herself and to others.

She came through the experience with flying colours—indeed she seemed to sing more sweetly and sympathetically when she sat at the piano, and she looked, as Lady Bettina said, as "pretty as a picture."

Derrick Wynstaye sat near Mrs. Chatfield in the audience.

He applauded as vigorously as possible to one whose arm was still in a sling, and, bitter as his heart had grown just recently, he could not be proof against the charm and the youthfulness of the girl at whom he was looking—the girl with the red-gold hair and the beautiful pleading voice and the delicate appeal of one who was certainly unworldly and unspoilt.

He had not troubled to open the letter Angela had given

him at the dinner-table till he had been standing a little apart in the concert-room; then he had laughed softly to himself as he had read the words which Patricia had pencilled hurriedly.

"I must see you," her note said. "There are certain things that *must* be said between us. For this reason I shall not go to the concert to-night, and I beg you to remain also. We shall find an opportunity of speaking together quietly. Send word to my room as soon as the others have gone."

There was a fire close at hand, and Derrick Wynstaye tore this letter in small pieces and tossed them to the flames.

He convinced himself now that it was in his power to give Patricia Lessingham some very unpleasant moments, and he did not stop to ask himself whether it was a very dignified or worthy feeling which decided him to continue as he had commenced.

Perhaps the thought had crossed his mind now and again that he regretted that Angela was the type of girl she was; but the one important fact which stood out clearly was the fact that she was close at hand, that she was undoubtedly attracted to him, and that for a variety of reasons he intended to use her.

Clever woman of the world as Magna Chatfield was, she was not clever enough to hide from this unnaturally embittered man what was passing in her mind, not merely where he himself was concerned, but with regard to the situation generally.

Oddly enough, he had never come across Richard Bosworth till now, but he had met and liked Mrs. Chatfield, and it hurt him a little to feel that he must most surely drift out of the good opinion of a woman for whom he had a sincere friendship and regard.

The harm that had been done to Derrick Wynstaye was however no slight wound.

Patricia's callous dismissal of him, her bold standard of worldliness, had torn from the young man all those feelings

which had been with him so naturally throughout his life.

He was a bit of an idealist really—that was why he had set Patricia on a pedestal and had worshipped her and her beauty, conceiving it but an outward symbol of a lovely heart and soul.

Derrick Wynstaye had graduated in a hard school.

The only son in a large family, he had at the time of his birth been surrounded by all that money could buy. His family connexions bound him to some of the finest blood in the country, but his father had been a spendthrift and a gambler, and when he had died he had left nothing, practically speaking, but a harvest of debt. All the plans which had been made for Derrick's future had, of course, been put on one side.

There had been his mother and his sisters to consider, and Eton and the University had been out of the question —in fact, he had been educated by one of his father's kinsmen, a certain Sir Gerald Fotherington, who had therefore considered he had full right to control the boy's actions and choice of a profession.

By inclination Derrick had always wanted to be a soldier, but his kinsmen had declared this was impossible, so he had been sent instead into the city.

When war had broke out his chance had come however, and he had enlisted as a private when the first demand for men had gone forth.

In a very short time he had been picked out for a commission, and had seen nearly a year's service out at the front when he had joined the Flying Corps.

He had met Patricia Lessingham first when he had been working in a city office. Circumstances had brought him in contact with her father, who, though a man who lived all his life in the pursuit of massing money, was not a snob and was quick to recognize promising qualities and to encourage them. Thus Wynstaye was asked to the Lessinghams' house not because of his social connexions—it may be doubted indeed whether Mr. Lessingham knew that he was even remotely related to titled people—he had been impressed by the young man's quiet business manner,

and he little imagined the result of that introduction; indeed he would have been extraordinarily surprised could he have known that a friendship had sprung up between his daughter and Mr. Wynstaye—a friendship which quickly became something warmer and deeper and more wonderful on the young man's side.

Why Patricia Lessingham chose to be so charming to Derrick Wynstaye in those early days is a problem one could not easily solve.

Perhaps she realized then that in this young man she had met one who possessed the power to move her as no other human being would.

So much she had confessed to him that last time they had met in the old summer-house.

"I do care for you," she had said then, "as much as I shall ever care for anybody."

Certainly she had given Wynstaye an unusual amount of encouragement.

Patricia had never been a sentimentalist even as a little girl, neither had she ever swerved from her determination to make the best of life for herself in the fullest meaning of the word, at least as she regarded the "best" of things.

She was surrounded by men of all types—homage was poured out before her as if she were a reigning sovereign. Her beauty had taken people by storm. Her wealth added to that beauty and had given her an enviable place in the world.

She had no intention of being in a hurry to choose a husband. This possibly might have been the keynote running through her mind when she had deliberately amused herself with Derrick Wynstaye.

To regard him as a future mate would have been to make her laugh, but she saw no reason why she should not enjoy his society.

She found a new sensation in this man's devotion, and so he was always welcome at the Lessingham house, and, though he told himself, being a struggler and a poor man, that it was madness to do so, he laid his heart at the feet of the young mistress of this splendid house, finding

contentment for the time at least in the knowledge that she regarded him kindly and had a definite place for him in her friendship. Then the war had come and everything had changed.

Patricia Lessingham loathed the war. She regarded it as being almost a personal insult to herself; it had so spoilt her future, and, what was even more ominous, it had shaken the foundations upon which that future was to be built.

To see her father looking old and worried, to hear rumours of disastrous failures, to be told in plain blunt language that if the war were to last a long time her father would be ruined, were enough to awaken in Patricia all that was hardest, most selfish, and most grasping.

One by one her admirers melted away; they had other things to do.

The fever of war spread throughout the country. Incredulity gave place to stern purpose. Dancing, gaiety, laughter, and careless enjoyments were all at an end.

And for a time Patricia felt absolutely lost.

The only one who remained faithful, the only one who was unchanged, the only one who knelt figuratively at her feet was Derrick Wynstaye, and she clung to him. Not because she intended to marry him; on the contrary, with the possibility of ruin coming to her father it behoved her to look about her and choose some man who could give her those things which she had always had. But she clung to Derrick—she even went so far as to fool him with the belief that she loved him as he loved her, only because her vanity demanded that she should not be left high and dry.

But in the months that had intervened after he had gone to France the great change in Patricia's life had regulated a little. Because she felt it was demanded of her, not because she had the slightest interest or desire to undertake such tasks, she had taken up a certain amount of war-work, and it was not long before she came in contact with a different class of man and began once again to feel the delight of receiving homage and of dominating

by the force of her beauty alone, as in the beginning she had dominated so largely by reason of her vast wealth. This was how she came to know Richard Bosworth and why she at once took him seriously into her regard.

The ruin her father had predicted had for a time been staved off, though things were not as they had been. It was only just lately that he had told her that it was impossible for him to hold out, that there must be reduction everywhere. The big house must be closed, the cars put down, her personal expenditure limited, her status wholly changed.

Of all the men whom she knew who fluttered about her either on leave or before they went out to the front no one was so rich as Richard Bosworth, no one was so desirable.

She had kept Derrick Wynstaye dangling on because of that strange attraction which he had for her and because she knew not that, poor as he was, there were possibilities in the future for him if he lived.

But his prowess as an aviator, his daring, his skill, his wonderful courage meant, of course, that he took terrible risks, and so it was that she determined to put him out of her life altogether.

Watching him as he sat listening to Angela, Mrs. Chatfield communed with herself and pitied the young man. There were times when, despite his extraordinary good-humour and his well-sustained effort of being absolutely indifferent, he looked worn and weary.

His physical sufferings might account for this, but she went below the surface, and Mrs. Chatfield felt that there was a raw wound in the young man's heart which had given him far greater pain than any of his other injuries, and her own heart contracted as she came to this conclusion, for, if Patricia had the power to make this man suffer so keenly, would she not deal out even greater suffering to the man she was about to marry?

Derrick Wynstaye was strong—he was built in a different mould from Richard Bosworth.

"I should like," said Magna Chatfield to herself half

passionately, " to let her feel something of what she has made this poor boy feel ; but Patricia has been born with a heart of stone, and nothing will hurt her unfortunately ! "

It is possible Mrs. Chatfield would have come to a different conclusion if she had been able to look in on Patricia Lessingham at that very moment.

Despite the fact that Captain Bosworth had stayed at home on purpose to be near her, Miss Lessingham had refused to leave her room. She had sent her fiancé an affectionate message by her maid, and she had longed to instruct this maid to find out if Mr. Wynstaye had gone to the concert.

To do this, however, would have been to expose herself to curiosity and comment ; therefore she could do nothing but wait in her room till he sent her an answer to her note, and as the minutes ticked by into hours and the hours passed away like the minutes and no message came, Patricia Lessingham realized that she had indeed and in truth lost all power to move this man whose will had been swayed hitherto by her slightest wish. More than this, a new sensation came to her, a feeling of jealousy—a feeling so burning, so demoralizing, that just for a little while she lost grip of herself.

Against her will she saw the face of Angela Fayne on the platform ; she heard in her imagination that clear, sweet, girlish voice ; she saw Derrick Wynstaye looking at Angela with a new look in his eyes ; and in the same moment that she confessed to herself she had driven him wholly out of her life, she knew that nothing—not all the wealth that Richard Bosworth possessed—could give her back the treasure she had so wantonly, so callously flung away.

CHAPTER XII

LADY BETTINA had been pressing Angela to remain on almost indefinitely at Peniston Court, and the girl, urged by her mother, had decided to stay at least another few days; but on the morning following the concert her plans were changed.

It was a little note from her sister Honor which brought about this change.

Mrs. Bellares wrote giving scraps of news about herself and her work, and then she told her sister that she had spent an evening with her father and mother and that she was very much perturbed about Mrs. Fayne.

"I am sure mother is far from well, and that is father's opinion too. You see, she has all these books to go through when she comes home in the evening, and the work has grown so much bigger than it was when she took on the post of treasurer that I feel sure she is altogether over-weighted. It is useless to say anything to Maud, but I shall be glad when you are home again, dear little Angela."

All at once there came over Angela a craving to be with her mother. She reproached herself almost bitterly for having allowed herself to be persuaded to stay on so long.

When the housemaid came to tell her that her bath was ready she had made her decision.

"I find I shall have to go home, as my mother is not at all well. I know Lady Bettina is never disturbed very early. Will you have this little note given to her, please, and will you ask some one downstairs to tell me a good train to take? I can pack my things myself," Angela added.

But the housemaid had other views, and when Miss Fayne was dressed and breakfast had been brought up to her the servant went quickly to work and put all her things together.

It was a very cold bleak day, and the train in which Angela travelled, though it was supposed to be a fast one, made the journey in very tedious fashion. Travelling in these later days of the war was by no means agreeable.

But London was reached at last, and Angela's heart thrilled as she packed herself and her belongings into a "taxi"—after some considerable time of waiting to obtain a cab—and was driven in the direction of her home.

It seemed strange at first to find herself in the crowded streets, to see the omnibuses, the wounded soldiers in their hospital garb, the masses of khaki which met the eye at every turn.

She was tired, for she had been very excited the night before, and she had not slept as usual.

Some few words that Derrick Wynstaye had whispered to her as they had stood a moment together waiting for the cars to take them back to Peniston Court had haunted Angela's memory, and not only the words but the voice in which they had been spoken and the look on the handsome face.

Others had poured out appreciation, praise, others flattered, but Angela remembered none of these, only Wynstaye's few whispered words.

She realized that she was almost glad that she was not going to see him very soon, for she had been drifting swiftly towards a land of enchantment during the last week, and she wanted to wake up to reality and just see where she stood and what all the new and conflicting feelings which had crowded into her mind so recently really meant. And yet it gave her a pang to feel that she was travelling away from him, for already he had a place apart in her thoughts, and what she saw there was very wonderful to realize.

Still, home is always home, and the thought that in a very little while she would see her mother again made her heart beat happily.

She had asked for a telegram to be sent from Peniston announcing her return; but when she reached the house she found that the telegram had only just been delivered and that her mother was at her war-work as usual.

"Look here," said Angela, "don't bother about the telegram! I'm going down to find mother now, and as you've got no lunch prepared I shall take her out and give her something to eat before bringing her back. I suppose Miss Maud's not in?"

"Miss Maud's away; she went two days ago, miss."

"Hurrah!" said Angela, and then she checked herself with a laugh. "I'm so glad—I mean I shall have mother all to myself!"

She left her things to be unpacked by the maids, and then she put herself into an omnibus, and went down to the depot, where her mother superintended several departments as well as acting as honorary treasurer.

The girl found herself hailed with distinct exclamations of relief.

"Oh, we are so glad you have come," one of the ladies said, "as your mother is just recovering from a fainting fit! I don't think Mrs. Fayne is well enough really to have been out these last few days, but we have had such a pressure of work that she would come."

Angela found her mother resting in a little room.

Just for an instant the girl stood and looked at the white beloved face without moving, and then she spoke her mother's name softly and tenderly.

The way in which her mother turned and held out her arms to her girl was both a pain and a joy to Angela.

"Dearest darling heart," she said as she knelt beside the chair and they embraced one another, "why *didn't* you let me know you were so poorly?"

Mrs. Fayne kissed her again and again, protesting meanwhile that she was not really ill.

"I never expected to see you, Angela!" she said. "What a surprise! I didn't think that you would be home for another few days at least."

"I came because Honor told me you were not well, and, oh, I am so glad I have come! Mothers like you are very precious, you know. I have had a most magnificent holiday, and now I am going to look after you."

They were driven home a little later in a car belonging

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to one of the ladies of the workrooms, and Angela insisted upon taking her mother straight upstairs to her room and putting her to bed.

"No, father will not be frightened!" she said. "I shall take it upon myself to explain to him that this is where you are going to stay until you feel much better." Then she knelt beside the bed and she kissed her mother. "Please say that you are glad to see me and that you have missed me a little bit!"

Her mother's hand rested tenderly on her head.

"My darling," she said, "it is quite impossible to tell you how empty this house is when you are not in it. As father said to me the other day, it just seems as if, when Angela is not here, all the sunshine disappears."

CHAPTER XIII

THE news of Miss Fayne's unexpected departure reached Miss Lessingham early.

A certain parcel which she had expected had not arrived, and her maid was dispatched downstairs to see if some one could telephone through to the station and inquire if it had been delivered there.

When the maid rejoined her mistress she informed Miss Lessingham that the parcel was at the station.

"I found that a car was just going with Miss Fayne and I asked the chauffeur to bring back the box, miss," she said.

Miss Lessingham, who was sitting in front of the fire glancing through her letters, turned round quickly.

"Miss Fayne?" she queried. "Has she gone away?"

"She's left in a hurry, miss, because she's had bad news about her mother—at least that is what I gathered from the housemaid who has been waiting upon her."

"Oh!" said Patricia Lessingham. She felt quite a distinct sensation of pleasure and relief, even whilst at the same time she was conscious of an equally distinct feeling of annoyance, even of humiliation, in the realization that the doings of so unimportant an individual as Angela Fayne could concern her in the very least.

But the fact remained that she was glad that the girl had gone away, and her heart began to beat a little quickly as she pictured to herself what move Wynstaye would make now.

The announcement of her engagement had been put in various papers and a stream of congratulations had poured in on her.

She was perfectly well aware that a certain amount of envy was mingled in with this congratulation, and in truth, although Richard Bosworth was not what she had resolved

should be her future fate in the commencement of her social success, he certainly was desirable enough to cause a good deal of heart-burning amongst many of the girls whom Patricia knew.

Moreover, in the present changed conditions of life such a marriage had an importance that might never belong to it in more normal times.

Naturally, the congratulations, good wishes, and the excitement attendant on her engagement were gratifying to Miss Lessingham, but when she was looking at things with very clear eyes she recognized that the whole business had been spoilt for her by Derrick Wynstaye—not in the least as she had imagined it might come about, but in a wholly unexpected manner.

Because, in a vague sort of way, she had braced herself up for a certain amount of unpleasantness, recrimination (even difficulty with Richard Bosworth himself which, as we know, was her first fear when she heard that Wynstaye was to stay at Peniston), and nothing of the kind had happened. This was upsetting to a conventional mind.

Assuredly Patricia had never imagined anything so extraordinary or so disagreeable as the experiences she had been called upon to go through during the last week.

She was not—so she assured herself—in the very least degree troubled about Angela Fayne as Angela Fayne. The hot feelings which the girl brought into existence were caused entirely by the fact that Angela had been undoubtedly chosen as the medium through which Wynstaye resolved to show his unflattering and humiliating indifference to herself ; therefore to know that the girl had gone away was a great satisfaction.

Beyond that she did not look for the immediate moment. She had no plans with regard to Wynstaye. Her only feeling was one of exasperation that he should deny her power and play a part because she decreed—and in this Patricia perhaps had some reason on her side—it was almost unnatural that he should have changed in so quick a time and that his former devotion and tender love should have died out so quickly.

A feeling of impatience took possession of her. She told her maid to get her outdoor things, and indeed she would have hastened downstairs long before her usual time for appearing if the thought of Richard Bosworth had not restrained her. She had not the least desire to see him —in her present mood indeed it might be disastrous for them to be together, so she dawdled about, getting more and more irritable every moment.

On the face of it, it would seem an almost incomprehensible thing that Patricia should find so little in Bosworth to attract her. He was a man admired, even loved, by many women—handsome, sympathetic, with charming manners—yet the truth remained, he distinctly bored Miss Lessingham. To her he represented one fact and one fact only—he was the solution of a difficult problem, the one individual who could give her a settled future and a definite place in society.

But, apart from these things, he was a man with whom she had, as a matter of fact, absolutely nothing in common.

He had not a tithe of Wynstaye's brain, and he was very weak. Though Patricia Lessingham loved to dominate, she despised weak people.

Her greatest sense of satisfaction had been the knowledge that she had been able to control and sway a strong man like Wynstaye—a man with hot passions, great ambitions, and who promised to be brilliant in whatever profession he took up. Correspondingly, her failure to move him now was made all the more bitter.

The usual morning letter from her lover had been brought to her room some little time ago and she had not even troubled to open it.

Now, when Captain Bosworth's soldier servant knocked at her door and asked for an answer, Miss Lessingham took up her letter and tore it open.

Her gloomy expression lightened as she read it.

Bosworth had written to say that unfortunately he had had a very bad night, that his arm was giving him a great deal of trouble, and that his servant had telephoned early

for the nearest doctor, who had insisted that he should remain in bed for the next day or two.

Miss Lessingham herself spoke to the servant, who told her that his master had been really ill and was still suffering a good deal of pain.

"Ah," she remarked, "that is the outcome of being foolish! Captain Bosworth insisted upon driving the motor yesterday. I knew he would do himself harm, but he would not be persuaded, and this is the result. Just wait a moment! I will give you a note which you can take back with you."

She scribbled a few affectionate words and promised to go and sit with him a little later on.

The mere fact that she had a few hours of freedom ahead of her sent up her spirits. Not even the knowledge that Mrs. Chatfield was in the house could depress her.

As it was pouring with rain she changed her mind now about going out, put on a becoming gown, and went downstairs.

She found Magna Chatfield in the hall, knitting. They exchanged a few words in a desultory manner, and then Miss Lessingham sauntered on into the drawing-room.

"I have piles and piles of letters to write," she said, "and as Dicky is ill I think I shall take this opportunity of doing them."

Mrs. Chatfield put down her knitting and looked at the girl in startled fashion.

"Dick ill!" she said.

"Oh, I'm sorry, but I thought of course you would know! Yes, he has had a bad night—his arm is upsetting him. You know Dicky is very obstinate—he will do things that he ought not to do! I told him——"

But Miss Lessingham found that she was speaking to empty air and that Mrs. Chatfield was mounting the staircase almost at a run.

A little smile broke the curve of Patricia Lessingham's beautiful lips.

"Thank goodness she is here!" she said to herself. "If Dick has his sister he won't want me!"

The drawing-room was empty, so she wandered on till she came to what was called the library, and here she found the person of whom she was in search.

Wynstaye was sitting at the writing-table going through a pile of what were evidently Government papers.

"Good morning!" said Miss Lessingham. "Please don't let me disturb you. Isn't it cold to-day?" She shivered as she spoke. "This is the only room that is warm. I tell Blanche they really ought to have central heating in this house. Shall I disturb you if I stay here?"

Wynstaye said "No" very shortly.

He was smoking, and he went on with his work without attempting to be interested or pleased at the advent of this beautiful young woman.

Patricia laughed shortly to herself as she sat down on the high leather fender which surrounded the fire-place and put up one hand to shield her face from the fire. She imagined that he was very annoyed, and angry in fact, at having been taken unawares, whereas he was what he seemed to be—quite indifferent.

There was silence in the room, broken only by the ticking of the old-fashioned clock, till she spoke again.

"You seem very engrossed in those papers. Perhaps you are not aware that you are treating me rather discourteously?"

He just looked at her for an instant with a little smile and answered calmly.

"These papers are very important," he said, and then he bent his head over them once more, and again there was silence; but the ease and the serenity which had characterized Patricia Lessingham's expression had disappeared now. She watched him sullenly and with hot anger growing in her heart.

After a while he folded up the papers and slipped them into a big envelope beside him, and then he got up, lit a fresh cigarette, and came towards her.

"Well?" he said. "You've tracked me down at last. Now what is it that you want?"

"I sent you a note last night," she answered, and she

spoke in a passionate half-stifled way. "I asked you to answer that note."

He sat on the arm of the big couch facing the fire.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I got it! I didn't answer it because—well, because there wasn't any answer to send. Pity you were not at the concert last night. That little Fayne girl had an enormous success."

"I'm not fond of music, as you know," said Patricia Lessingham.

"No," he answered her; "that's a pity. You miss out a good deal."

She answered him hotly.

"Suppose we stop talking in this silly fashion and come to the truth!"

He looked at her through half-closed eyes and blew a little cloud of smoke from between his lips.

"The truth!" he said. "But how could we possibly discuss the truth. You do not even know what truth is! You are a sham, Patricia! Beautiful but perishable!"

She drew her breath, and her heart began to beat a little quickly.

This at least was a little better than the smiling indifference which had so exasperated her.

"You are very angry with me, and therefore of course it pleases you to abuse me."

"My dear girl," Wynstaye answered her lightly, "if you really want the truth where I am concerned I can give it to you, strange as that may seem to you it's a simple fact, in a very few words. I am now absolutely indifferent to you. I don't care a jot whether you are beautiful or whether you are hideous. To me you are of no account whatsoever."

Patricia crimsoned and then grew very pale.

"Take care," she said; "you may go too far!"

For answer he laughed.

"A threat!" He shrugged his shoulders. "Why, that doesn't frighten me in the very least!"

She caught her breath and choked just a little, and then she said half brokenly—

" I never thought that you would ever be cruel to me, Derrick ! "

He blew another little cloud of smoke from his lips.

" No—you only thought I was a fool ! Some one to be taken up and dropped just as the mood pleased you. It's not a flattering conclusion. A hanger-on is really rather a contemptible creature. Why "—he changed his tone just for an instant—" you were never once so near liking me, all through the old days, as you are now when I show you that I don't care what happens to you one way or another. That's your type, and you are faithful to it." He got up leisurely, shook off his cigarette-ash, and then turned away. " I'm sorry to seem discourteous, but really any further conversation between us is not only unprofitable but rather absurd ! "

Before he reached the door he paused again. Turning, he looked at her, and it came to her that she had never realized till now how handsome he was, how desirable, how finely he stood, what splendid eyes he had, what virility there was in every line of his body.

" Look here, Pat ! " he said. " It is none of my business, and yet just because once I was ass enough to believe you to be something better than anybody else in this world I'm going to speak out. You've got your chance ! Bosworth is not only a rich man, he is a good chap—clean, honest, straight as a die ! I repeat, you've got your chance. Take it—try to realize that there is something better in life than your vanity, your love of luxury, and your criminal selfishness. You haven't succeeded, thank God, in breaking my heart, but be careful how you go with him, for he is made of very different stuff ! "

She was staring at him, and her eyes looked pleadingly out of her white face.

There was a rather helpless stricken look about her, and this touched him.

" I hate to speak to you or any woman in this way," he said, " but you force me to do it. Now we have had a clear understanding, however, I hope there will be no occasion

for a repetition of a scene which can only be painful and most unprofitable."

It was not till some moments after he had left her that Patricia Lessingham found that she had the strength to get up and move away.

Her feeling was one of almost incomprehensible mortification and anger.

It was perhaps as well for her future career—looked at from a worldly point of view—that Richard Bosworth was shut up in his room, otherwise such was her mood she might even have gone so far as to break off her engagement.

That of course would have been madness; as it was, Patricia resolved to bring her visit to Peniston Court to an abrupt end.

It would have been difficult naturally for her to leave while Bosworth was ill had Mrs. Chatfield not been near at hand, but she could easily make some excuse—clothes or other business connected with her forthcoming marriage—and so secure for herself at least a few days of liberty.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. BELLARES and Angela combined to keep their mother in bed a few days, and in this they were aided most cordially by their father. In fact Mr. Fayne confessed to his younger girl that he had been growing very anxious about his wife.

" You know," said Angela on one occasion as she came into her mother's room and perched herself on the end of the bed—" you know, darling, your great fault is that you want to turn the handle for everybody."

" I confess," said Mrs. Fayne, with a little laugh, " that I do love minding other peoples' business. That is why I am always getting into muddles, I suppose. I had a charming letter from Lady Bettina this morning," she added. " You must read it, Angela. She has lost her heart to you, and says such flattering things about your singing."

" She gushes a good deal," said Angela ; " but all the same she's very kind. Did Honor tell you, mother, that she has had a letter from Captain Bosworth asking her to paint him ? He evidently wants to give a portrait of himself to his wife when they are married."

" No, she did not tell me this, but she ran in for such a hurried moment yesterday," said Mrs. Fayne. " Darling Honor, I am so glad ! She is getting quite well known now, isn't she ? "

" Oh, yes, she has made her reputation, you know, mother, and I fancy that portrait of Miss Lessingham will create a little sensation ! I wish Honor could paint you just as you are now," added the girl. " With that blue wrap on you look good enough to eat ! "

" I wonder how they are getting on at the workrooms ? " observed Mrs. Fayne after she had laughed at this remark.

" Quite well, thank you," remarked her daughter ; " at any rate if they are not they are not going to have you

back just yet awhile. You have done more than your share. Well, now, I must go and put on my things. I suppose I shall have to take up my orderly duties the beginning of next week, and I don't believe I want to one little bit, only it really is not quite fair to leave Theo Masson to do everything. I shan't go every day," Angela resolved; "three times a week will be quite enough, then I shall be able to devote a little time to you. Now I'm going out to do my shopping, and I shall call at the library. Have you made out a list?"

With a little laugh and an increased colour in her cheeks Mrs. Fayne handed Angela a piece of paper with some writing scribbled on it.

"I don't want to read anything very clever, darling," she said apologetically, "but, if you insist on keeping me in bed, I must have some books, and I don't want any war stories, Angela."

"You shan't have anything you don't want," said the girl.

"I am a very quick reader," added her mother, "and you know we can easily get these books back to the library before Maud comes home."

Angela stood in the middle of the room and looked at her mother with a frown.

"Now look here!" she said. "Let's understand one another. I've made up my mind, and I've come to the conclusion you shall not be bullied by Maud or by anybody else. Why on earth shouldn't you read the books you want to read? Let Maud fill herself up with all the stodgy literature she wants to. Honor and I have agreed that we will not let you be forced and ordered about. I only wish father could take you away for a little while; you would be so happy having a holiday, you two dear things together."

"Oh, that's quite out of the question!" said Mrs. Fayne hurriedly. "Everything is so dear just now, travelling and hotels. We couldn't think of it."

"Well, then," said Angela, "if you can't go away, you are going to enjoy your own home, and I am going to let

Maud know that before she has been back here five minutes "—and she spoke firmly. "If you are very good," added the girl, "I'll bring you in some chocolates. It isn't supposed to be unpatriotic to buy sweets for soldiers, and goodness knows you have worked as hard as any soldier."

As she let herself out of the house and passed into the cold damp streets Angela's lightheartedness seemed to fade away.

Perhaps it was the touch of the wintry wind that was carrying flakes of snow with it which sent a little depression into her heart; perhaps it was a renewal of a strange sense of loss which had crept into her thoughts so frequently since she had left Peniston.

She was very happy back in her home and looking after her mother—a dozen times a day she told herself how happy she was—and yet there was a little shadow resting on that happiness, and about the old familiar places and things something seemed to be missing. She had a reluctance to sit alone; she wanted to tire herself out so thoroughly during the day that when she went up to her own room to go to bed she would fall asleep at once and not to think. At Peniston it had been different. There it had been rather lovely to lie in bed and recall all that had happened during the day, especially during that last ten days of her stay.

Possibly some very practical person might have suggested that what Angela was feeling was the translation of a house run on very luxurious and comfortable lines to one in which every penny was of value and economy was the order and motto for everybody concerned; but Angela herself would have laughed this idea aside. She had, it is true, thoroughly enjoyed the luxury at Peniston Court, the delightful cooking, and the fact that there were numbers of servants apparently to wait upon her.

But the lack of these things in her own home would have been quite powerless to bring to her that curious little sense of craving—for what she hardly knew—and that touch of loneliness which every now and then would creep into her heart.

She possessed however the happy knack of throwing off depression ; and as she walked briskly in the direction of Oxford Street, making her way to the library, Angela took herself to task.

" Why on earth should I be grumpy ? " she asked herself. " I've got mother all to myself and I'm having a lovely time. What more on earth can I want ? "

Yet it was a conundrum for which she could not find the answer. But her sharp walk did her good ; she shook off the black feelings which oppressed her by degrees, and by the time she reached the library her cheeks were aglow and she was feeling altogether better.

There was a certain amount of household shopping to do, and she next approached some big stores in the neighbourhood.

Angela was passing in through one of the doors with a crowd of people, when some one spoke her name.

Like a flash of lightning a sense of joy ran through her, and, turning, she looked up at Derrick Wynstaye.

" Oh ! " she said breathlessly. " How do you do ? Fancy I was passing you and I didn't see you ! "

" I saw you," he answered. " As a matter of fact I have already been chasing two young females whom I imagined might be you because they had hair something like yours ; but I soon found out my mistake."

He was holding her hand and she was clinging to his.

" I'm very glad to see you," she said. " Are you much better ? "

" Oh, I'm ever so fit," he answered—" at least I say I am, and I hoped I would have been able to get out again this week ; but I'm put back for another board. Such a nuisance ! I say, it is real luck meeting you, Miss Fayne ! Do you know I was just wondering if I dare call at your home and inquire how you were."

" Oh, come back with me, won't you ? " said Angela. " I've only got a little shopping to do here."

" May I ? " He was unfeignedly glad to see her. She had a vitalizing effect upon him. The sparkle in her eyes, the freshness of her colour, and a certain elusive charm

which he did not attempt to qualify acted on him as a stimulant.

"Why, of course!" said Angela. "Mother will be awfully glad. I'm keeping her in bed; she wants rest very badly; but she always receives in her bedroom when she isn't really ill, you know, and I've told her so much about you."

"That's very nice of you, Miss Fayne," said Derrick Wynstaye. He paused an instant and then he said, "I'm afraid Mrs. Fayne must have been a little bit upset when she heard about our first meeting."

The colour deepened in Angela's cheeks.

"Oh," she said, "I didn't tell mother about that! I wanted to, but you remember you asked me not to speak about it to anybody, so I thought perhaps it wouldn't be quite loyal even to tell mother."

"Dear little soul!" said Derrick Wynstaye; then he added quickly, "Now, can't I come and help you with your shopping?"

"If you like, but I am only buying things for the house."

"Oh, I'd love to come and buy things for the house!"

"I want to take back some fish for mother's lunch and a little fruit."

"Well, here am I, strong and hale and hearty, ready to be your porter or your footman!"

"When did you leave Peniston?" asked Angela as they made their way through the crowd into the provision department.

"Oh, I left two days after you did! It was so dull down there without you, Miss Fayne."

"That sounds awfully nice," said Angela in her frank pretty way; "but I suppose it is just the sort of thing you feel you must say."

"I don't always say the things I feel I must say; but in this case I'm telling you the absolute truth. We all felt in the dumps. You see, poor Bosworth was wretchedly seedy, and his sister was shut up with him nearly all the time. Miss Lessingham had to come to London."

"I expect her going made a great difference," observed Angela.

"Oh, she wasn't really missed very much!" said Wynstaye straightforwardly. "On the contrary, I believe everybody was rather glad when she went. I know I was."

Angela gave him a very quick look and frowned slightly.

Though she had come to the conclusion that her first suggestion with regard to this man and Patricia Lessingham had been a wrong one, yet there lurked in her mind the feeling that, despite his frank indifference and Miss Lessingham's engagement to Captain Bosworth, there had been something more than friendship between them.

It was some time now since Angela had looked at that letter tucked away in her small jewel-box, but she had never forgotten it; and at times the conviction that this man beside her was the one who had written it was very strong.

Perhaps she might have drifted away from imagining things about Wynstaye and Patricia Lessingham if it had not been for the fact that Miss Lessingham herself had brought the idea back to her mind.

Not that there was any reason why Angela should be troubled about a matter which so obviously did not concern her, only she was sensitive, young, romantic, and it hurt her to remember the pleading in that letter, to recall Wynstaye's haggard and suffering appearance that memorable night when she had first looked upon him, and to associate these things with the attitude which he now evidently held towards Miss Lessingham.

As they finished her shopping and walked out of the stores Wynstaye said to her in a low voice—

"I don't want you to have anything on your heart that may be a burden. I feel convinced that you are accustomed to tell your mother everything; in that case I beg of you to let her know how sweet and kind you were to me that night and how I frightened you." And then he hailed a "taxi," and as he put her into it he asked her to wait a few minutes. "I have forgotten something," he said;

and when he reappeared his arms were full of flowers. "My own mother is wandering the earth somewhere," he announced, "but I am going to pretend that I have a right to take flowers to your mother."

Angela's voice was not very steady, and she did not see very clearly as she answered him—

"You are very, very kind."

She was so happy! Without diving into her heart or seeking to find the reason, she knew that the depression—that curious sense of sadness which had clung about her so persistently—was entirely dispelled now.

When they reached her home Wynstaye refused to go in then.

"I shall come back this afternoon, if I may," he said, "and beg a cup of tea. Would that suit your plans?"

He helped her to carry her parcels into the little house, and then he drove away in the cab.

A little later, when Angela was putting the flowers in different corners of her mother's room, she talked about him easily and brightly, and yet it did not require very much discrimination on the part of Mrs. Fayne to grasp the fact that here was one who possessed more than a passing interest for her girl.

But mothers are gifted, most of them, with a tender tact which permits a certain amount of evasion and short-sightedness. So Mrs. Fayne was careful to confine herself to asking the most ordinary questions and discussing Mr. Wynstaye in the most casual way possible.

Angela had heard a little about him and his family when she had been at Peniston Court.

Lady Bettina had loved to gossip about the young man.

He had become a special favourite with her, and not merely because he happened to be her son's best chum, but because, as she confessed to Angela, she found him the most fascinating and delightful creature.

So now the girl was able to tell her mother all she knew.

"I'm sure you'll like him, mumsie," Angela said. "And then you always adore heroes! And, according to Lady Bettina, Mr. Wynstaye has done most marvellous things

out at the Front. She knows his mother slightly, and I don't fancy she cares for her very much. At any rate Lady Bettina said a good deal about Mr. Wynstaye having sacrificed himself for his family, and she denounced his mother and sisters as being very selfish. Possibly, however, she is prejudiced, because I believe she only repeats what her own son tells her."

"I think I shall get up this afternoon," said Mrs. Fayne. "We'll have tea in the drawing-room. Yes, I'll have my dinner in bed, but I should like to get up and receive Mr. Wynstaye in proper fashion. Bring down all the flowers, Angela. How lovely they are!"

Derrick Wynstaye confessed to himself that he had rarely spent a more delightful afternoon.

He fell in love with Mrs. Fayne on the spot, and he found fresh charm in Angela. Seen in her own home she seemed to have a surer poise and a touch of dignity which he quickly appreciated.

After she had left Peniston he had told himself that he was glad that she had gone; and this despite the fact that her hurried departure had threatened to thwart him in the line of conduct he had followed since he had met her.

But it had come to him suddenly that in following up the very decided impression he had made on this girl and making of her an innocent accomplice he was doing something mean and unworthy.

His rupture with Patricia Lessingham had taken from him something more than an unselfish love and faith—it had destroyed for him, temporarily at least, all thoughts and hopes of making a future for himself; and, although he now surveyed this woman whom he had loved from an absolutely different standpoint, and could afford to laugh at the old infatuation, it had given him in place of blind loyalty and faithful love a sense of freedom. All at once he realized that he had been a literal slave ever since he had fallen under the spell which Patricia had exercised over him.

He resolved to be a slave no longer.

Henceforward, though he would not deny himself the

pleasure of woman's friendship and sympathy, he determined he would tie himself to no one individual.

Patricia had despised his ambition, and had told him so with almost brutal frankness. She had driven him back to it with his enthusiasm and his determination increased a hundredfold. It was no empty pretence with him when he spoke of impatience at being compelled to remain idle a little longer.

He hated to be out of the rush of things. He knew his power, his almost uncanny skill, and it made his heart-beats quicken just to picture himself back on the other side of the Channel doing his "bit," no matter whether he faced death on every hand.

And so when he left Mrs. Fayne's drawing-room that same afternoon, carrying with him a delightful picture and conscious of the most charming influences, he told himself he would not go again.

For without undue vanity the man had seen (what Angela herself as yet was ignorant of) that he already occupied a place in her thoughts which could be dangerous to her peace of mind.

"The best thing that can happen to her will be never to see me again," he said to himself. Nevertheless, that same evening, as he sat in a crowded restaurant eating a solitary dinner, his mind turned irresistibly to the thought of the small house where Angela lived; to the delightful drawing-room, with its well-chosen appointments and its gracious mistress so sympathetic, so sweet and motherly, the very ideal of a woman who lives in and for her home.

And to one who, like Derrick Wynstaye, had never known this charm of home-life, the call of such simple things stirred him in a way that was new and enduring.

His own mother was a cipher in his life. She had never recovered from the loss of her social position and her money. Always a fretful, restless creature, she spent her days travelling about from one place to another, quarrelling with her daughters, impatient with her son.

The money she possessed was spent entirely on herself. There was enough to have started a home, but Mrs. Wyn-

staye had shrunk from the idea of living in a modest fashion. She preferred to spend her life in hotels ; and there was a bitter feud between herself and her husband's people.

It was now nearly two years since Derrick had seen his mother or his sisters.

Several were married ; two lived abroad ; one was nursing in France ; the youngest one was the wife of a wealthy American and rarely came to England.

This sister had been Derrick's favourite.

They had always had a good deal of sympathy with one another, and now and again he received letters from her, giving an account of all her doings and sending him pictures of herself and her children.

But home in the real sense of the word had never been revealed to Derrick Wynstaye till this afternoon as he had sat talking with Mrs. Fayne, while Angela at the piano was playing softly and every now and then breaking into song.

Though he had no place in it, yet he would carry away with him a remembrance and a picture which afforded him a sense of delight and of sadness, for it only served to emphasize how little there was to which he could cling, how empty all his honours would be should he fulfil all he had undertaken in his own mind to perform.

To the outside person perhaps it might have seemed absurd that Mr. Wynstaye should have regarded himself as being such a lonely individual, for in truth he possessed a great number of relatives, with some of whom as a boy he had been on terms of affectionate intimacy. But gradually the young man had grown away from his family connexions, and his infatuation for Patricia Lessingham had been a potent factor in dividing him from other people.

He spent a restless evening—wandered into a theatre for a little while and wandered out again, hesitated several times about looking up men who he knew were home on leave, and finally turned in at his hotel and went up to his room, not to go to bed, but to sit and smoke and try to read.

He almost regretted now having left Peniston.

He was finding out, as many another has done before him,

that one can be far more lonely in a crowded city with life pulsating all around than one is out in some country place miles away from railways or people or traffic, and all at once he resolved to leave London the next day. There was one place which always had a welcome ready for him—a certain farm-house in Surrey, kept by the woman who in the early part of his life had had the care of him, who had taught him his first lessons, and lavished on him the love which had been so necessary to him.

She had not been very young in those days, and now she was a widow and ran her farm herself with the help of two stepdaughters.

" I'll send Alice Carter a wire in the morning, and I'll look out the best train."

This was his last thought as he went to bed, and he fell asleep feeling soothed and comforted.

Next morning, however, he changed his plans.

It was a letter from Lady Bettina that was instrumental in bringing this about.

She wrote giving him some news about her son and also informing Mr. Wynstaye that she was sending on several small possessions of his which he had left behind ; and then she gave him news about Richard Bosworth and announced that the date of his wedding had been definitely fixed and that it would take place within a week.

" Of course it's going to be very quiet. This is not the time for a big splash, although with a bride so important and beautiful as Patricia I feel that there should be a certain amount of fuss. But no doubt she is wise in choosing to have a very quiet wedding. I am wondering," Lady Bettina wrote on, " if we shall hear of another bride before long. I am not betraying any confidence, for Colonel Quaine makes no secret of the fact that he has completely lost his heart and his head to Miss Fayne. He told me yesterday that he intended to ask her to become his wife. And really he was so sweet about her and he looked so nice, and he is such a dear, that I almost forgot his age, though he must of course be old enough to be her father. Still I am quite sure he adores her ; and, as I fancy she likes him,

and he is so rich and could give her so much, it is just possible she may accept him."

Derrick Wynstaye crushed the letter in his hand; he felt a sudden impulse of fury possess him.

It seemed to him almost shocking that Lady Bettina could contemplate calmly the possibility of such a sacrifice.

And there came into him also a rush of feelings which if he had been in a mood to analyse them would have proved to him how closely akin the modern product of civilization and education is to the elemental man. This rush of feelings was awakened by the mere suggestion that Angela was to be won and mated in such a fashion. He suddenly realized that she meant more to him than he had imagined —that he had need of her; and with this realization came the determination to bind her to himself without loss of time.

It was not love he felt for her—at least not such love as he had lavished upon Patricia—it was the feeling that something precious, something unusual had come suddenly into his life, and that he would be a fool if he did not take steps to possess that something before another could step in and oust him.

Perhaps, too, there mingled with this a sort of savage pleasure that his marriage would convince Patricia Lessingham of the fact that he had broken the very last link in the chain with which she had held him for so long.

At any rate, acting on impulse and feeling his heart throb with a new sense of pleasure, he went to the telephone and rang up Mrs. Fayne's house.

It was Angela herself who answered.

Wynstaye went straight to the point.

"Look here!" he said. "I want to see you. I've got something very important to say to you. Could you possibly come out?"

He heard her catch her breath and then say—

"Oh, yes, yes! Where do you want me to come?"

"I'll be in the Park, near the Marble Arch. It's a beastly

morning, but I won't keep you very long, and I know you're not afraid of snow or mud."

She laughed, and he caught the little nervous thrill in that laugh.

"Eleven-thirty," he said. "I shall be waiting for you."

Before he went out he sat down and wrote a letter and addressed it to Mrs. Carter, Old Barn Farm, adding the name of a little village not very far from Guildford.

"DEAR OLD THING," his letter ran—

"Don't be surprised if you get a wire from me asking you to put me up for a day or two. I may also want you to find room for a friend. I'll try to give you a day's notice. I'm put back for another Board. It's rather rotten luck, yet it gives me the opportunity of doing certain things which I should have had to put off if I had gone back to France this week.

"Ever yours,

"DERRY."

It was not raining when he left the hotel, and as it was early he walked to the Park.

He was there nearly ten minutes before he caught sight of Angela.

The glorious colour of her hair broke the sombreness of her clothes.

She was smiling, but she was very pale, and he could read her agitation quite easily.

As she came nearer he went forward and held out his hand with an encouraging smile.

CHAPTER XV

"DON'T look so frightened," he said.

She laughed, though her colour rose.

"I'm not frightened."

"Well, why are you trembling?"

"I hurried. Just as I was coming out some one came from the workrooms wanting to see mother, and I had to interview this lady and try to impress upon her that mother is not well enough to go back to the depot just yet."

"Quite right!" said Wynstaye. "You put your foot down; show them how tyrannical you can be."

Angela laughed outright.

"Oh, I am not a tyrant, Mr. Wynstaye! If you only knew it I am a most awful coward. I am a horribly nervous person really. I hate rows and arguments, and I can never stand up for myself. In fact I am rather a worm, I am afraid."

"Um!" said Derrick Wynstaye. "Well, I've got a different opinion about you. I believe you could be awfully strong and do fearful deeds of daring if occasion demanded. I've tested you already, remember. Anyway, I am positively sure you will know how to fight for your mother."

"Well, I do my best," said Angela. "Only mother won't always let me fight."

"She's a sweet thing, your mother," said the man. "I'm envious."

The light in her eyes and the colour that came anew in her cheeks made her very pretty to look at.

"Well, she took a great fancy to you, Mr. Wynstaye."

"That's splendid! But it isn't enough. Do you know why I have asked you to meet me here this morning? I want to ask you a great favour."

She caught her breath.

"Oh, if there is anything I can do——"

" It's a very big favour," he went on. " Something so big that unless I go at it with a dash I shall never dare ask it. Angela, I want you to marry me ! "

She stood still and looked at him, first with incredulous eyes and then with shy ones.

" I told you I was going at it with a dash," he said, smiling at her. " It isn't at all a conventional way of doing things ; but it's my way. And life is so different from what it used to be that, you see, we men have got to put out our hands and clutch at the good things that come in our path lest some unlucky chance drives us onward and we lose all that is beautiful and desirable."

She was now very pale. She wore a little hat made of smooth black feathers ; her coat and skirt were of black velveteen.

With the wind blowing her red-gold curls and the colour drained out of her cheeks and her lips she looked pathetically young, and she moved his heart with a tenderness which was new to him.

" How old are you ? " he asked her suddenly.

She paused just an instant, and then she said—

" Oh, I am getting on ! "

" You look a baby, but a very sweet and fascinating one ! Well, now I suppose I have frightened you."

She confessed this was so.

" Or at least I might say you have startled me. I—I never imagined——"

He took her up quickly.

" Why, of course you never imagined anything of the sort ! And that's one of the big reasons why I want you. Just now you said that your mother had lost her heart to me. I'm frightfully bucked about that, but it isn't enough. What I want to know is what do you feel about me ? "

She caught her breath.

" Oh," she said, " I—I don't think I can tell you that ! I hardly know myself." And then all at once she contradicted her words. " Yes, I do know. I like you—very much. I liked you the first time I saw you."

"Because you were sorry for me?"

"Perhaps," she said slowly. "But"—she gave a little shrug to her shoulders—"how can we describe these things? There were other reasons."

They were pacing slowly along again, and the charm of her personality gripped him. He had an uncontrollable desire to stop still there in the open and take her in his arms. He had a longing to feel her clinging to him and to kiss the colour back into those pale lips.

Her hesitation made his determination take deeper root. He would not lose her; he would not stand aside and see her go to another man, whether he were old or young.

"We chaps who fly," he said, "take chances practically every hour of the day. Sometimes we get what we want right away, sometimes we have to try again; but we are not a very patient lot. And I'm about the biggest hustler of the crowd. I just can't wait to do this thing in a stiff and starchy manner. I've got to know my fate now." He paused an instant, but went on speaking before Angela had time to frame a reply. "I'm a man with strong views about certain things," he said. "Where it is a question of marriage I don't think anything ought to enter into the mind of either the man or the woman except the one great and vital condition whether they care for one another."

"But then, you see, in our case this is rather difficult, for I don't know you," said Angela, plucking up her courage, "you don't know me."

He contradicted her flatly.

"On the contrary, I feel that we know one another just as well as if we had been acquainted for years. And, in my opinion," he went on boldly, "that doesn't matter. The one fundamental element which we have to study is —can we live without one another? Now I have come to the conclusion that I can't do without you, and what I want you to tell me is whether I am essential to you or whether you don't care if you never see me again."

Angela was laughing. Oddly enough, his straightforward words restored her courage.

"Dear Mr. Wynstaye," she said, "you *are* a hustler!

You don't really seriously expect me to answer that question ? "

" But I do," he replied promptly. " I want no beating about the bush. I want no outside interference. I want you, my dear, to look me in the eyes and answer me straight from your heart. Because——" He broke off, then he said abruptly, " Let's sit down here ; the wind has dropped and it's not very cold."

She obeyed him, and as she did so she asked—

" What does that ' because ' mean ? "

Before he answered he took her hand and held it very tightly in his.

He found intense pleasure in seeing the colour come rushing swiftly into her cheeks and in feeling her tremble.

Bleak as the day was and desolate the scene about them, he felt quite an amazing sense of gladness take possession of him as he sat holding that small hand in his.

" Why," he said, " there's a whole heap of things wrapped up in that one word ' because.' But the chief one is that I'm a very solitary fellow. I've had most of my illusions and early hopes smashed up, and I was in a pretty bad way till I met you. Then I knew I had found the one thing essential to make life good for me again, something to steady me ; something to work for, to live for. And that is why I want to make that ' something ' my very own before I go out yonder again."

Angela gave a little gasp.

" You want to—to marry me so soon ? "

" I should like to marry you now, this very moment," he answered. " But of course that's not possible. Even an unconventional hustler like me has to realize that certain things are expected of him. If you do consent to marry me I've got to let you know all about myself ; I've got to satisfy your parents that I can keep you ; I've got to prepare you for the fact that I can't offer you gilded palaces or deck you with superb jewels—that I am, in fact, an exceedingly bad match."

" Please don't talk like that," said Angela. " Palaces

and jewels are not much to one who has never had them. If——"

He caught her up quickly.

"Ah," he said, "then you are not going to send me away —turn me back to my lonely life without a shred of hope?"

Angela took her hand away from his, though he did not relinquish it easily; and then she sat and looked at him.

"I wonder if you are serious?" she asked wistfully.

He gave a very swift look round, and then, bending forward, he put his lips to hers.

She shrank a little from him, but he knew instantly that his kiss did not offend her.

"Don't be afraid," he said, "no one saw us!" And in the same breath he added, "Angela, will you marry me? I'm full of faults; in many ways I'm a most unsatisfactory beast! But, oh, my dear, I do need you, and I can't begin to tell you what you are to me, what you mean to me! Please marry me!"

Her eyes were looking into his eyes, and her hand stole into his once again.

"If you really do want me——" she said; and she did not finish her sentence.

He kissed her a second time; then he got up and drew her hand through his arm.

"Now then, I can face the world!" he said exultantly. "I feel as if I were born again." He looked at her tenderly, gravely. "You are a very extraordinary little creature! Where does your spell lie? in your red-gold hair, your eyes, your voice, or in your beautiful sweet heart? Well, no matter; all these things belong to you, and you now belong to me. I'm going to give you only a few days, Angela, and then I'm going to carry you off to have and to hold from now till the end of my days. Suppose we run to the end of the path?" he suggested.

He saw that she was moved almost to tears, and he wanted to shake away all sorrow and to put some of his own forceful energetic spirit into her.

They ran along the path like a couple of children, and pulled up panting and laughing, to compose themselves

into a sedate appearance as they drew near to the Marble Arch.

"Now you must come along with me," he said. "I've got some shopping to do to-day."

"I mustn't stay out long," said Angela. "Mother will be expecting me."

"Oh, I'll make everything right with mother!" he answered. "I'm going back with you. I'm going to have lunch with you. I'm not going to let you out of my sight more than I can possibly help. You see," he said, "I'm not quite sure of you yet, and I can't afford to take risks."

He hailed a "taxi" and drove her to Bond Street.

At a jeweller's he took her in and bought her a beautiful old diamond ring and one or two other little gifts.

Angela sat like one transfixed. The lovely jewellery appealed to her; but the man himself was far more fascinating, far more wonderful. She watched him like one enthralled; and there came to her, almost unconsciously, a thrill of passionate pride in the realization that he was her man, that, amazing as it was, he had chosen her, that they were to belong to one another.

Back in the cab he put the ring on her finger and gave her the packet containing the other gifts.

"You should not have bought these things," she said to him softly. "You told me——"

"I remember all I told you," he answered. He could not kiss her lips—there were too many eyes around them—but he bent over her hand and kissed her wrist.

"When I see that ring," he said, "I feel half-way on the road. I'm so glad I met your mother yesterday. Perhaps I shan't give her such a shock, for somehow I believe she was able to read beneath the surface. Some mothers are very wonderful in understanding things, and yours is the sweetest mother I have yet met."

When they reached the house he asked for Mrs. Fayne, and Ellen, glancing from her young mistress to him, became all excitement.

"The mistress has just come down to the drawing-room,

sir," she said, adding as she looked at Angela, "She said she couldn't stay in bed any longer. There have been a good many telephone messages for her. I've got them written down, miss; the mistress said you would perhaps answer them for her when you came in."

"Will you go up to the drawing-room alone?" asked Angela of him, with a voice that was not quite steady.

He gave her a smile and followed Ellen up the stairs, and Angela turned away into the dining-room and sat down on one of the chairs rather heavily. She felt dazed, almost sleepy. Her excitement was so enormous, her emotions so jumbled and yet so wonderful that she needed a few minutes to herself just to steady her pulses and gather up her courage so that she might be strong and calm to meet all that was likely to happen in the immediate future.

CHAPTER XVI

DESPITE the fact that she had made a point of having a very quiet wedding, Miss Lessingham found that the affair could not be carried through without a certain amount of publicity.

There was something about the way in which Captain Bosworth was eager to let all the world share his secret which was pathetic.

" It isn't every day that a man is so happy as I am, and so I don't see why we should not get married and let all the world come and look on who choose to do so." Then he had become practical. " You see, darling," he had added, " I've got so many people belonging to me who feel they have the right to turn up at my wedding, and you have so many friends."

She smiled at him and shrugged her shoulders.

" Have it your own way ! " she said, and so she ordered herself a bridal gown such as she had always intended she would wear, and invitations were sent out hurriedly, and her father was called upon to take a big suite of rooms in one of the smartest hotels, where the gifts and the guests could be assembled.

Captain Bosworth was showering jewels and gifts upon his future wife.

It was easy enough for him to go into a shop and choose such things, but he found no one of his presents give him half so much delight or interest him so much as the portrait which he had commissioned Mrs. Bellares to paint. There would not be time for him to pose for her till after he came back from his honeymoon, but he went to discuss the matter, and as he sat in her studio and made friends with her little boy and looked at her—with pity moving his heart and admiration mingling strangely with that pity—the young man was conscious of a peculiarly charming tran-

quillity, a restfulness, an atmosphere which appealed to him more than he realized at the time. For in truth he was not yet strong, and all the excitement and energy required of him at this moment strained his strength rather heavily.

He told Honor Bellares how much he admired Angela and how he loved her singing.

"You are so alike and yet so unlike," he said.

Mrs. Bellares smiled faintly.

"Angela is only a child. Her life has scarcely begun."

"But you are not much older," he said involuntarily, and then very quickly he changed the subject. He had seen the expression which had swept across her face, and so he talked about her painting.

Richard Bosworth was very sweet with the child Christopher.

It moved Mrs. Bellares in a way she could hardly have described to see him sitting with her little boy in his arms.

She hoped he would have children and she hoped that he would be happy, but there clung to her mind a feeling that his future was destined to be barren and much that he expected would never come to him.

Just because she had grown to know Patricia Lessingham so well—and when one paints a portrait one gets to know the character of a sitter almost imperceptibly—she almost grieved that this man had chosen such a woman for his wife.

She refused an invitation to the wedding.

"I never go out anywhere now," she said. "I'm really so busy, and then I try to do a little war-work. You see, there are many days on which I can't paint, the light is so bad."

But she gave him her good wishes, and after he had gone she sat and thought about him, feeling that yearning tenderness which is so natural to a woman such as she for a man of his type.

He reminded her in some ways of her dead husband. But Honor Bellares had other things to think about, and that

very afternoon another and a very different man came to her studio.

Derrick Wynstaye had refused to be taken to be introduced.

"I'm going alone," he said to Angela. "I don't want you to introduce me or try to impress your sister with your view of me. I want her to take me on her own valuation."

She brought a little lump into his throat as he first saw her—she looked such an etherealized likeness of Angela, such a delicate, sorrowful creature.

"We've got to be great friends, you and I," he said, stretching out his hand to her. "Angela is waiting in the cab. She wanted to come up with me, but I wouldn't let her. Something very wonderful has happened. I'm going to be your brother. Yes, I want you to study me, look at me, and read my heart."

Honor Bellares let her hand rest in his and looked at him steadily.

"Do you love Angela?" she asked.

He said "Yes" just simply.

Her lips trembled.

"Angela is very dear to me, so dear that I—that I could never tell you in words. She is a child as yet not quite awake. You must not play with her or you may break her heart."

"There is something behind these words," said Derrick Wynstaye. "Speak out!"

A little colour rushed into Honor Bellares's cheeks. She hesitated a moment; then, drawing her hand away from his, she said—

"I live so out of the world, yet every now and then it is brought here to me in my studio. Your name is familiar to me, Mr. Wynstaye, and, though I have never met you, I have heard——"

He silenced her.

"Put away from your mind, from your memory, all that you have heard. I will tell you in a few words what you feel about me. You believe that I was in love with Patricia

Lessingham. That is quite true. I gave her something more than love—I put into my feelings for her all the best that was in me. I shut my eyes to her failings—I would not listen, I would not see. I lived under a spell, but the spell is broken. My eyes are opened ; she herself destroyed the foolish infatuation which possessed me for so long. Just now you said you could not put into words what you feel for Angela. I am going to answer you in the same fashion. She means everything to me. That is a very banal expression, I know, but it is the absolute truth." He was speaking swiftly yet firmly. "What I mean by 'everything,'" he explained "is that Angela symbolizes all that I have missed in my life, all that I want to come. I believe I can give her great happiness. I shall work for that. There will not be a moment of my life when she will not be in my thoughts. Won't you give us your blessing ? "

She had walked to the window, and now she turned round and in a low voice she said—

"Bring Angela to me, please."

He was downstairs on the instant, and as he got Angela out of the cab and took her through the door of the studio he drew her for a moment into a corner and wrapped his arms about her.

"You are my girl, aren't you ? " he asked. "You are not going back from your word ? "

She shook her head and smiled. He kissed her passionately and pressed her almost fiercely in his arms ; then he said—

"Your sister wants you. I'm afraid I have upset her a little bit, but somehow I think she likes me all the same."

* * * * *

Honor Bellares did like him. There was something irresistibly attractive about him, something which appealed to her. She liked his boldness, his sense of virility. She found him almost beautiful. Vaguely she envied Angela. Here was a man who loved, who would love in no anæmic fashion ; here was a man who might do great things, a man to be proud of, and yet a man who might sink and drift recklessly to this end if some cruel chance stepped in

and divided him from the girl whom he desired for his wife.

Mr. Fayne, a little bewildered, found himself easily persuaded to agree to the marriage.

Mrs. Fayne said very little to her girl, but she too saw a little beyond the surface, and, as Wynstaye himself had said, read the young man's thoughts.

Nevertheless, there hung about the house a sense of bewildering excitement.

Mr. Wynstaye gave no one any chance of being dull—something was happening "every five minutes," as Ellen put it; flowers and fruit came daily. He paid the most delightful court to Angela's mother; he took Mr. Fayne out to dinner.

He captured Angela on every possible occasion, carrying her off for shopping, for walks, or some delightful little jaunt, and he made preparations for their marriage to take place with as little delay as possible.

When Mrs. Fayne talked about clothes he shook his head.

"No; no need for clothes. I don't know what Angela wears, but what she has is quite good enough for me. Besides, we are going to spend our honeymoon at a farm-house; she will want the roughest garments there."

The one little cloud on the amazing brilliance of the outlook to Angela was the recollection of her sister Maud.

Miss Fayne was still away. Unluckily or luckily, she had contracted an attack of German measles, and was of course unable to return home. The friends with whom she was staying were very kind. They kept Mrs. Fayne supplied with constant news, and assured the mother most warmly that there was not the slightest occasion for anxiety.

Angela herself wrote and gave her sister the news of her engagement and forthcoming marriage.

"I hope you will like Derry," she scribbled. "You won't meet him now till we come back to town. I suppose he will be given about ten days' leave before he goes out again."

Maud Fayne sent no answer to this letter or to her mother's epistles. She was astounded and most unplea-

santly surprised. Honor's marriage had seemed in a sense a slight to herself, but that Angela should become a wife whilst she had still no matrimonial future settled or even in prospect was a blow, and a bitter one.

The illness which had at first been so annoying now appeared in the light of a great relief. She would at least be spared taking part in what she foolishly called Angela's triumph over her.

But the fact that she had to be naturally left a great deal to herself—being for a time in quarantine—gave her the opportunity of encouraging that bitter sense of resentment and of building up her feeling of injury.

* * * * *

When the wedding was over and the young husband and wife were driving away Angela sat in the car very quietly for a little while.

She had curbed her tears because she saw that her mother was making a gallant effort to be bright and apparently happy.

But these same tears had been perilously near her eyes till her husband had drawn her towards him and kissed them away. Then they had sat hand in hand till she had given a sigh and spoken.

"I can't believe I'm married," she said; "it all seems so funny."

"I'm quite real," Wynstaye answered. "You can pinch me, if you like, and I'll scream to show you I'm alive. You are not fretting?" he inquired in the same breath.

She shook her head.

"No. I'm—I'm so happy; that's what upsets me. Not that I am unaccustomed to be happy," she added, "only this is all so different."

"I hope you are not disappointed because you did not have bridesmaids and bouquets and all that sort of thing?"

"I never thought about it," Angela answered in her pretty frank fashion. She said then, "I think we had a lovely wedding; and it was all so beautiful and happy; and I'm so glad Maud wasn't there."

At this he laughed outright.

"Maud seems to be a bogey with you."

"It is horridly mean of me," said Angela, "but, you see, she isn't exactly one of the family, and then she does dominate mother—that is the only thing I've got to regret. Mother won't have me to take care of her now."

"Why, yes, she will; you can be there every day when we come back to London; in fact I want you to be with her as much as you possibly can when I go out again."

She drew near to him, nestling close beside him.

"Oh," she said, "won't they give you some more leave?"

"I'll have a shot at it, be sure of that. You don't suppose I want to go away from you, do you?"

It was not a very long journey down to the country. Wynstaye had ordered a car to meet them when they arrived.

"I expect there will be enough petrol to get us to the farm," he observed. "I want you to like Alice Carter. She was really a kind of mother to me when I was a little chap, and she has always been devoted. This farm will be a place for you to come to when you feel tired of London."

Angela had only a confused idea of what the old house was like when they arrived, but she took an instant fancy to Mrs. Carter.

They kissed one another with real affection, and her heart was thrilling as she was led upstairs to a quaint old-fashioned bedroom with queer windows and pretty chintz curtains and bed-hangings.

"We don't dine late as a rule," Mrs. Carter explained, "but I've got a little dinner for you to-night as it is such a special occasion, and I'm giving Derry some of his favourite food. Here come your boxes! I dare say you would like to change. I'll send my girl in to help you unpack."

But Wynstaye himself appeared at that moment and laughingly refused this offer.

"I'm here," he said, "and I can wait on my wife. We shan't be long making ready for dinner, Alice, and I don't mind telling you that I'm awfully hungry, as I have had very little to eat to-day except wedding-cake." When

they were alone he stood and held out his arms, and as Angela went to him and put her head on his breast he folded her in a clinging embrace. "My wife!" he said. "How wonderful it sounds! How wonderful I feel!" He put his hand under her chin and turned her face up to his. "Is it wonderful for you too? Do you think you like me just one little bit?" He kissed tenderly, passionately, and as he took his lips from hers Angela bowed her head and buried her face on his breast. She made him no answer in words but he was satisfied.

CHAPTER XVII

THE announcement of the Derrick Wynstaye marriage caused a good deal of surprise and awakened an equal amount of interest. To some people it really was an exciting piece of news, and one of these people was Lady Bettina Storrington.

"I never was so surprised; it has quite taken my breath away!" she said to her daughter. "Had you the least idea that they cared for one another? It seems quite a romance; but, oh, dear me, what will poor Colonel Quaine say?"

Miss Storrington dismissed Colonel Quaine very lightly.

"I think it was rather absurd of him to suppose that any young girl would care to marry him simply to be a companion to his daughter. But you are quite right, mother, about this being a surprise." After a little pause Miss Storrington added, "I feel rather sorry for her."

Lady Bettina stared at her daughter.

"Sorry! But, my dear Blanche, why? Mr. Wynstaye is the most delightful man, and you know how fond your brother is of him. Why, Ted does not think there is another créature in the world to approach Mr. Wynstaye! I think Angela is very lucky, although of course presumably there is not much money."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking about the money! I don't suppose that matters very much to a girl with simple tastes like Angela Fayne. I was looking at things from a different point of view. Though I don't rave about Derrick Wynstaye, I quite understand how you feel about him. He is very attractive, as various women have already discovered."

Lady Bettina Storrington was slightly old-fashioned, what is called nowadays Early Victorian, which signified that she was a kindly creature with simple impulses and

a limited outlook and a romantic and yet temperate disposition. She now turned round and looked at her daughter with her brows contracted.

"Do you mean that Mr. Wynstaye is a flirt? I think a man who flirts is detestable!" she said.

Blanche Storrington, who happened to be going through some household accounts with her mother, laughed slightly, and as she answered she continued to glance through certain of the servants' books.

"I don't suppose Derrick would be above amusing himself if the opportunity occurred, but I wasn't thinking about that so much. I was wondering if they hadn't come to a decision in too great a hurry. By the way, mother, you must point out to Parker that this pantry-book is much too heavy." In the same breath Miss Storrington went on, "You see, Mr. Wynstaye and Angela only met here. A week is scarcely long enough in which to get sufficiently acquainted with one another—at least to embark on matrimony, is it?"

But Lady Bettina did not quite agree with her daughter.

"Why, my dear, some people know at once whether they are going to care for one another. That was the case with your dear father and I, so why shouldn't it be the same with these two? I must say they will make a very handsome pair, Blanche. I am going to write to them to-day and beg them to come and stay here as soon as they get back from their honeymoon. I do wonder what your brother will say! I suppose he will be a little disappointed; he and Mr. Wynstaye have been such great friends."

"I expect Ted will be surprised," Miss Storrington replied.

She might have said a good deal more, but she checked herself. After all, her mother was not the most discreet person in the world, and, although Blanche Storrington did not possess any particular sympathy or friendship for Angela, she had no intention of doing anything to upset the girl.

To herself she communed cynically—

"She'll learn the truth soon enough, poor little soul! One can't exactly blame him, but, all the same, it is rather a mean way of trying to pay off an old score."

Mrs. Chatfield too received a shock when she read the news of the marriage in the paper.

Angela meant to write to her, but there was so much to do in those few excited hurried days, and Wynstaye gave her so very little time to herself, that much had to be put on one side which she wished and intended to do.

Truthfully it may be said that Mrs. Chatfield's first sensation was oneof hottest anger against Derrick Wynstaye. In her opinion he had acted despicably. She accused him, as Miss Storrington had, of having married Angela simply and solely as a means of revenging himself on Patricia Lessingham, and she was unfeignedly sorry for Derrick Wynstaye's young wife.

But after a while, however, her anger faded out. Gradually she began to see the matter from a more practical view.

"Perhaps I am wronging him," she told herself; "and, after all, she is a very sweet child. It ought not to be so hard for him to care for her."

She resolved, as far as lay in her power, that she would see as much as possible of Angela.

There never would be any likelihood of a warm sympathy springing up between herself and the woman whom her brother was about to marry; but friendship with Angela could be productive of much pleasure, and there were many ways in which she might be of help to the girl.

She wrote therefore a few very sweet and affectionate words to the little bride and sent them to Angela's home. Letters and telegrams of congratulation flowed in, and were all forwarded by Mrs. Fayne and read with the greatest interest by the little bride.

Wynstaye declared that he wanted nobody or nothing from the outside world in those first days of their married life.

"Don't read all those stupid letters; come and talk to me," he commanded.

With a blush and a laugh Angela obeyed him, but she took her letters with her at the same time.

"Don't you like to hear all the nice things people say?"

He answered—

"No; I don't want anything or anybody but you."

"Honestly and truly?" she queried.

"What do you mean by 'honestly and truly'? Don't you believe your husband?"

He put his arm about her, ruffled her hair, and then kissed it.

"I don't believe you love me," he said suddenly, "because I am not sufficient for you. You don't mind being by yourself, and you are perfectly happy when letters come and telegrams arrive."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Angela, trying to laugh—not a very successful effort, for the touch of his hands thrilled her and his kisses made her heart beat.

He mimicked her.

"What do I want you to do? I want you to stand up and declaim your love! I want you to let the whole world know that there is nothing on this earth so wonderful to you as I am! Now, don't laugh!" he remarked sternly. "I am in dead earnest. The fact is, my darling little wife, I don't think you realize the sort of man I am."

Angela was laughing.

"Am I to be frightened of you?" she asked.

He answered her promptly—

"Yes. I want no indifference in our married life. I want you to know that you are my mate, and I want you further to know that I have chosen you because I know there are capabilities in you which are not to be found in the ordinary everyday woman."

She caught her breath rather quickly.

"Oh, please!" she said, rather tremulously. "Oh, Derry dear, don't make me out strong or brilliant or clever! You know I am not that."

"I know that you are adorable," he answered, "and I am going to make you strong and brilliant and clever. We are going to be, in fact, a really very remarkable pair."

She laughed heartily at this, and the sound of that laughter came through on the open window to Mrs. Carter, who was working in the room below, and brought a smile to her lips.

Though it was early in the year and there had been a frost overnight, the sun was shining, and it was one of those untimely but gorgeous warm days which sometimes happen in late January or February, so their window was set widely open, and they sat looking out over the country, delighting in the warmth of the golden sun.

Angela loved this old farm-house.

He had taken her to all his pet corners, and they had explored the farm together.

After his last remark Derrick had sat on the wide window-ledge and pulled her down beside him.

"Now," he said indulgently as he lit his pipe, "you can read your letters, if you want to."

"You've got all yours to read too," said Angela.

"I shall burn them unopened," was his remark, at which she caught her breath.

"Oh, Derry dear, you can't do that—it isn't kind!"

"Kind!" he said. "Who wants to be kind to a lot of gossipy people who are simply dying with curiosity to know all there is about us and our marriage?"

"We do seem to have surprised some people," said Angela.

"That only shows what a lot of fools there are in this world, because if ever two people were made for one another those two people are here. Don't you believe you were made for me?" he queried.

She blushed, as he loved to see her do.

"I don't know, darling," she said, answering him seriously. "I only know that you are everything to me. I can't describe exactly all I feel, and you don't want me to, do you?"

He took her hand and kissed it.

"Be yourself and you'll satisfy me."

She gave him a smile and then sat back, looking dreamily out of the window, and he sat and looked at her.

A miracle had come to pass. It seemed to him that in Angela he had found everything that had been lacking in his life. He dared to look ahead and envisage the future, and as he did so his heart swelled and he was conscious of a great emotion.

Home, real comprehensive love, sympathy, those bonds of family, so simple and yet so strong, for which he had craved so long and so vainly, all were now to be within his reach. There was only one cold shadow over the wonderful illumination of that future—a shadow of their coming separation, a shadow of possible danger ; even in his most infatuated moments for Patricia he had never lost a certain recklessness, a certain defiance, as it were, which had carried him unscathed through innumerable dangers. This was perhaps the most potent element in the change which Angela was working in him.

Of course he was keen to go back, but he no longer chafed at the enforced rest ; he even found himself hoping, vaguely it is true, that he might still be considered unfit for the Front, when he went up for his next medical board.

Sometimes when he sat lost in thought, Angela would look at him and her heart would thrill a little nervously. She longed to follow his train of thought, to know what was passing in his mind. He had won her impetuously, but he had won her altogether, and, though they were so widely different in every sense of the word, there was nevertheless an extraordinary bond of understanding between them which was something quite apart from their love—so passionate on his side, so sweetly abnegating on hers.

To be regarded as his mate, the one being in the world, according to himself, in whom he had found those qualities which were necessary and vital to his happiness, was a joy too great to be realized all at once.

Considering how little they knew of one another, how short had been their acquaintance, it was extraordinary how quickly they had fallen into step, as it were ; yet there came moments—as was inevitable—when the girl at least awakened with almost a throb of fear to the enormous

change which had been wrought in her life just recently. It was her very simplicity and her ignorance of worldliness which constituted Angela's safeguard at this time. Had she been skilled in her dealings with men, had she grasped in the faintest way the meaning of the autocratic spirit which already dominated her, she might have been a little nervous about the future.

But Angela came to her husband with all the wealth of her illusions and girlish dreams and romantic fancies unspoilt, and, though she was by no means colourless—having indeed a fresh though gay spirit of her own—the glamour which had been creeping slowly into her heart during that last week at Peniston Court possessed her now in its entirety, and, as was natural to one of her disposition, she was quickly making a hero of the man she had married.

It was only now and then that there came moments when she felt, with a little chilled sensation, that she was really outside his life in some ways.

For instance, as he sat now smoking, with his brows contracted, lost deep in thought, it gave Angela a little pang that she could not divine what this mood of silence might forebode.

Wynstaye had one of her small hands gripped in his, and the thoughts that were rushing through his mind were not too pleasant at that moment—in fact it had come to him with a rush of something like remorse that he had acted it might be selfishly, that in securing this young creature for himself, in binding her to him for always, he ought to have been more reasonable and taken a little more time, for, if this marriage had worked so surely such an extraordinary difference in himself, what must it not mean to Angela ?

They would be together sufficiently long enough for her to feel that she no longer had a separate entity, that she literally lived through him and with him ; thus to separate from her, to go back to the war, to carry his life in his hands, to be in danger every day, it might be every hour, took upon it a significance that had never come before.

He would have on his shoulders the responsibility not

only of duty but of remembrance. Suddenly he shivered as he pictured to himself the hour when he should kiss her lips for the last time and hold her in his arms perhaps in everlasting farewell.

Angela felt him shiver, and spoke hurriedly.

"I—I don't think you ought to sit at this open window," she said. "Though the sun is so warm, the wind is cold, and it is really not even spring as yet."

"Let us go out," he answered. "There are some little lambs I want to show you."

She got up at once, slipping on her knitted coat and cap, but before they left the room he put his arms about her and pressed her head down on his breast.

"Whatever happens, you are going to forgive me, aren't you?" he said, and his voice was not quite steady.

What he had in his thoughts was that he must ask forgiveness for the anguish and the sorrow that he knew would come upon her if anything happened to himself.

Angela did not quite understand him, but she answered him quickly.

"Forgive! What a funny word to use! What have I to forgive?"

He answered her question with another.

"I want you to tell me just simply and from your soul —are you happy with me?"

It was she who shivered now, and he felt her pressing closer to him.

"Surely," she said in a low voice, almost a whisper— "surely you know the answer to that."

He lifted her face up and he kissed her tenderly, passionately.

CHAPTER XVIII

THEY stayed a day or two longer than they had arranged at the old farm-house, but at last they had to come away. There was so much to be done.

Angela would have arranged to live with her father and mother if they had been alone during Wynstaye's absence, but she was the first to recognize that it would be impossible to do this whilst her sister Maud was there; and then, again, her husband took an enormous pride in finding some little place for her which was to be near her home.

"You must be close to your mother," he said, "so that you can see her every day, so that you can run in to her if you feel lonely or want advice, but I shall come back to you. They will give me leave at any rate in three months, and then I don't want to go to an hotel; I want to have a home of my own."

So they spent several days driving about looking at little flats, and at last they found one.

It was right at the top of a big building, but it had a pleasant view, and it was daintily appointed and would require very little furniture.

They found that wedding presents had accumulated during their absence and that several people had sent them useful and acceptable gifts.

Wynstaye had cabled to his sister Mrs. Von Alstyne in America the news of his marriage, and she had sent him back a return cable full of affectionate words for his wife and himself, and also announcing that a certain sum of money would be at his disposal to purchase a suitable present for his bride.

Sir Gerald Fotherington also remembered Wynstaye generously, and other members of his father's family wrote him letters and sent small gifts.

They carried all these presents to their little home on the

very day that Richard Bosworth and Patricia Lessingham were married.

Captain Bosworth had sent Angela a most charming bit of jewellery; but neither letter nor sign had come from Miss Lessingham except that she had given orders that an invitation to the wedding should be sent to Mrs. Bellares.

It was Honor who was called in to help with the arrangements of the little flat.

Mrs. Fayne willingly ceded this duty to her elder daughter.

Maud by this time had returned from her visit and had met Angela's husband.

She could be very agreeable when she liked, and she chose to be so with Derrick Wynstaye. Indeed she made an agreeable impression.

"She is deucedly good-looking, you know," he said to Angela—"a pity you don't pull together."

"If you say nice things to me about Maud," his wife replied hotly, "I—I shall throw something at you! Of course she is nice to you—you're a man!" Then Angela sat down and looked up at her husband. She had on an overall and had tied a duster round her head, but some stray curls peeped out prettily. "Honestly, I don't want to be nasty about Maud," she said, looking up at him with wistful eyes. "I am not really a cat!"

At which he laughed.

He had taken off his tunic and was in his shirtsleeves, very busy mounting the steps and hanging pictures.

His arm was now quite well again, a fact which depressed him only because it meant that the separation he dreaded was drawing near.

"I know all there is to know about you, Mrs. Derrick Wynstaye," he observed. Then he added, "Don't fret your dear little soul about your sister Maud or about anybody or anything," he added. "Just come and tell me if this picture is straight."

The task of setting their little home in order was a happy one, and sometimes Honor Bellares would sit and look at them with a smile on her lips, with a mist of tears in her eyes.

Their joy in being together, their wonderful happiness, only emphasized her own loneliness and the sorrow which had scarcely even yet begun to fade.

And then there was a grand festival on the occasion of their first dinner-party.

Mrs. Carter had offered to stay a while with Wynstaye's wife to set her well on the road and to help generally, an offer which Angela had accepted most eagerly.

The young wife loved to listen to stories about Derry when he was a boy. It was from Mrs. Carter that she heard all about his early days, and who drew for her pictures of his mother and his sisters.

"You don't know what it means to me," the older woman said to Angela, "to be here in this little home, to look at you and to know that at last Derry is going to have his share of happiness. He deserves it every bit." On another occasion she said, "He is just like he used to be when he was my boy. He was the most mischievous, naughty, delightful creature that you can imagine, and always so handsome—very like his father! When I hear his laugh now it seems to me that the last ten years have been wiped out of his remembrance and that he is starting afresh with nothing to shadow him or trouble."

"Do you think he was very unhappy, then?" Angela asked, with a little catch in her voice.

"I don't think he was any too happy, my dear. Of course, when his father died and everything changed, Derry showed of what stuff he was made; he lost everything, you know, and it was precious hard for a boy of his temperament and his upbringing to have to be ordered about and practically kept at attention the whole time. Has he spoken to you much about Sir Gerald Fotherington, my dear?"

Angela shook her head.

"No, very little, but I haven't asked any questions. I have felt that if he wanted to tell me things he would rather tell them of his own free will. I do know, though," Angela added in the same breath, "that Derry was awfully pleased with the letter that came from Sir Gerald the other

day, and he certainly sent us a beautiful wedding present."

"Well, I hope you will meet Sir Gerald before long," said Mrs. Carter. "He is not what's called a sympathetic man, but I hear that he is much changed of late. The loss of his youngest son when the *Hogue* was sunk has been a dreadful blow."

Angela shivered.

"Poor man!" she said. "Of course he must be awfully unhappy."

Mrs. Carter sighed.

"Two other of his sons are fighting now. I sometimes wish that Derry had cultivated a warmer friendship with the Fotherington family. I am quite sure this would have been possible, and, all things being considered, it might have been desirable; but Derry was always very proud, and he started out with a wrong idea about his guardian, and that was his mother's fault. You are not likely to be troubled very much with Derry's mother," Mrs. Carter went on, "for she very rarely comes to England, but I'll give you one word of warning. If you do meet her make up your mind not to worry about anything that she may say to you, for she is sure to have something sharp or bitter on her tongue where Derry is concerned."

As she saw the pained look in Angela's eyes Mrs. Carter hastened to add—

"You mustn't judge every mother by your own, and let me assure you, my dear, that the separation between Derry and his mother was none of his doing. She alienated him from her at the time of his father's death, when he was so overwhelmed with grief and needed so much comfort. I did what little I could, but, after all, I was only an outsider. However," Mrs. Carter added brightly, "all that is over and done with, and now he's got a home of his own and some one who will live only and solely for him."

She laughed as she said this, and then she patted Angela on the shoulder.

"Of course there are a good many people who would say that that's the wrong attitude for a wife to take, but I am very old-fashioned and sentimental, and I believe

enormously in a woman giving up everything if need be for her husband."

This was only one of the many little chats which Mrs. Carter and Angela had together, and it was interpolated between much sound common-sense counsel with regard to housekeeping and a few essential cooking lessons—indeed the little dinner which was served to Angela's people was very largely the work of her own hands and very much appreciated in consequence.

And when the dinner was over the little hostess played and sang. The flush of excitement and pleasure lingered in her face. She wore one of her new frocks, and tears came into her mother's eyes as she sat and listened to her.

Whilst they had been on their honeymoon there had been moments when Mrs. Fayne had agitated herself with qualms, regretting the haste of the marriage, doubting whether they had done wise to consent to it ; but this evening in Angela's own little home swept away doubts and qualms and fears and brought to her that quality of joy which was so intense as to be almost a pain.

It was very sweet to be waited upon so tenderly and treated so affectionately by Angela's husband.

Wynstaye was in his most charming mood this night.

It needed very little to attract him to both his father and mother-in-law, and to both Angela's parents there stole a feeling of contentment in that their child should have chosen one so sympathetic to themselves.

Like Derrick, however, the shadow of what lay in the future hung over them.

They had but to look from Angela's radiant happy face to Honor's spiritually saddened one to realize how quickly, how cruelly, how callously the hand of disaster, if not of fate, might fall upon this sweet little home and blot out all that made it so radiant and so desirable.

No one, however, spoke of what lay beyond this night, least of all Derrick Wynstaye, and yet the blow, in a sense, had fallen for him, for he had that day been up for his medical board and had been passed as fit to return to the Front.

Ten days' further grace were granted to him—ten short days in which he would have to play his part bravely, keeping up his heart and laughing and joking, holding off, as it were, at arm's length the grisly phantom of fear which lurked at the heels so persistently these strange and terrible times.

CHAPTER XIX

CAPTAIN RICHARD and Mrs. Bosworth had been lent a house in Cornwall for their honeymoon, and Patricia elected to do the journey by motor-car, stopping here and there *en route*. The question of petrol shortage was one about which she did not even trouble herself, therefore it was distinctly annoying to her when they had reached about half the journey to be informed that it would be more advisable if they completed the journey by train.

In any case she was not only annoyed, but bored.

At his wedding Captain Bosworth had made a gallant appearance, and every one had congratulated him on his recovery, but his sister had seen with clearer eyes than most, and she had taken him on one side just when the reception was coming to an end and had urged upon him the necessity of taking great care of himself.

"Remember, Dick," she said, "you are by no means out of the wood."

"Oh, I shall be as right as rain!" the young man assured her. "Besides, I shall have some one to look after me now, you know. I say, did you ever imagine anything more lovely than Pat looks to-day? Everything has gone off top-hole too, hasn't it?" He talked on excitedly, but was kindness itself to his sister. "It was awfully good of you to come, dear old sis!" he declared.

Mrs. Chatfield and he were standing apart, and she kissed him tenderly.

"Dick dear," she said, "be sure and let me have news of you. Don't overtire yourself. You are coughing a good deal these days. Try and get rid of this cold. Don't go long walks or do anything that requires great exertion."

Of course he had promised her laughingly that he would be the most sensible person she could imagine, and she had reproached herself and refrained from saying any more, for

in truth she hated to bring even a little shadow over the glory of this day, the day of days for him ? He was so wonderfully happy, and certainly he had every right to be proud of his wife.

Beautiful as Patricia Lessingham had always been, she had never worn a more superb look than on her wedding-day. Whether in her bridal-gown or in her travelling-wraps, she stood apart and above all other women, and as the bridal pair drove away the crowd outside the hotel gave a little cheer.

They made such a fine couple !

Mrs. Chatfield had moved about among the guests wearing a smile, but having an ache in her heart.

She listened to all the congratulations and the words of envy and admiration for the wonderful array of presents, but she longed for the moment when she could be alone to try to forget everything that this day signified to her.

And when at last she was able to do this and her maid had removed her wedding finery and she was alone in front of her bedroom fire, she reproached herself for being so depressed.

Once again she told herself that it would be impossible for any woman, however worldly or hard-hearted she might seem to be, not to care for Dick. He was so lovable ; moreover, Patricia had chosen to marry him. She had picked him out from the various men who fluttered about her, and, though perhaps he was richer than most others whom she knew, surely the man's personality, and, above all, the wonderful love which he lavished upon her, must have had something to do with the matter ?

Magna Chatfield shut her eyes and sent up a little prayer for her brother's happiness, and then she sat down and wrote a long account of the wedding to her husband.

" Dick is by no means well yet, but I am hoping great things of this visit to the English Riviera. If only they have good weather and he can be out of doors I think he ought to pick up his strength quickly."

Unfortunately, the weather did not fit in with a bridal programme.

They had arrived at their destination in the afternoon of a glorious day, and Richard Bosworth had insisted on showing his wife all the beauties of the grounds.

His soldier-servant had joined him from London, and this man was only too quick to realize and to notice, when his master went to his room to dress for dinner, that Captain Bosworth was unduly fatigued, almost exhausted.

"By rights, sir," he said, "you ought to go to bed this evening. You'll have a temperature, that's sure!"

But Richard Bosworth repudiated this suggestion.

"I'm all right!" he said petulantly. "Give me some of that tonic stuff; I'll sit and smoke here for a quarter of an hour and then I'll dress."

The room his wife occupied was a spacious apartment, with windows that looked right over a stretch of country to the sea beyond.

Patricia had parted from her husband with a sigh of relief, and she sat crouched up, looking out of one of the windows to that shining sea beyond with a sullen expression on her face and a burning resentful impatience eating her heart.

Now that the die was cast and she belonged to Richard Bosworth she told herself that she had been a fool!

She did not despise all that he could give her—that would have been contrary to her nature—but she told herself she surely could have procrastinated. Bosworth was not the sort of man to fade away and desert her, however long she might have kept him waiting. He would have always been at her beck and call, and she could have retained her freedom, which all at once appealed to her as the most precious possession a human being can command.

She was not thinking wholly of herself either, strange to say. It came to her in this moment of silent retrospection that Bosworth had done a very bad thing for himself.

He had made an idol of her. There would be some bitter disillusionment for him when he began to realize the type of woman she was.

She knew now that in cutting Derrick Wynstaye out of her life she had not only acted cruelly, disloyally to the

man, but she had bereft herself of perhaps the only chance in life offered to her to know happiness.

Now she withdrew all she had said to him.

She even marvelled at the blindness which had shut her away from the truth. She had told him that they had not a grain of real sympathy between them; she had insisted on the dreadful mistake their marriage would have been; but as she sat looking out on the fading glory of the spring sunset and felt almost vaguely the charm of the wildness and spaces of this stretch of country, she knew with a bitter pang that she would give everything which she now possessed to take back those words.

His marriage had stunned Patricia, and yet it awakened paradoxically an exultant throb of vanity. He had amused himself with Angela Fayne to irritate and defy her when they had been at Peniston; he had carried the game to this bitter end simply and solely to punish her, to let her imagine he had done with her altogether. It was his way of pressing home the fact that her hold over him was over, and he had certainly punished her, for she had not grasped till this moment what it was to suffer as she now suffered.

She rose as her maid came in, and she dressed for dinner sullenly, silently.

Her temper was so bad that the woman waiting on her had looked at her with some trepidation.

Downstairs, when she had been having her tea, the bridal couple had of course been freely discussed.

"She's a bit of all right to look at, she is," the chauffeur had said—he and the car had travelled by train. "But I like 'em less 'aughty, I do. I'll be sorry if she don't give the Captain a good time."

"She isn't out to give him much; she means to get all the good times for herself," the maid had remarked. "You wait till you see her in one of her nasty tempers! I tell you I'm not over fond of being near her now and then."

Captain Bosworth's servant had been present on this occasion, but he had said nothing.

His thoughts were busy enough, however, as he helped his master to get into evening clothes. Away from London and regulations he was able to wear mufti for a change.

The young man looked extremely handsome and attractive as he knocked at Patricia's door.

It seemed to him so wonderful to be allowed to enter the room—this intimate room of hers, bearing the fragrance of her favourite scent in its atmosphere; full of all those little feminine possessions which had such a special thrill for him because they belonged to her.

He found her standing once again looking out into the dusk.

The lights had been extinguished in her room.

She turned quickly as her husband's voice sounded behind her.

"Are we to go down?"

"Yes, I think dinner is just about to be announced."

He bent and kissed her white shoulder, and as he did so Patricia shivered.

Fortunately, he misunderstood the significance of this action.

"Oh, dearest, I do hope you haven't caught cold!"

"No, I am only tired. I was feeling a little depressed. I suppose that is natural," Patricia added, with a laugh. "We have had so much excitement. There was bound to be a reaction."

They went down the broad old-fashioned staircase together.

The house that had been lent them was one belonging to an old Cornish family.

All the men-servants had been called to the Army. Their place was filled by women, and the eyes of these maids rested with admiration on the young husband and on Mrs. Bosworth.

They noted the beauty of the few jewels she wore, the clinging elegance of her gown, but they noted also the expression on her face, and there was not one of them that did not give a little tribute of sympathy to the man she had married.

Once during the dinner Patricia stopped, drew her breath rather shortly, and looked about her.

"It is so quiet here," she said—"no sounds except the wind in the trees. How *can* people live in places like this?"

Just a little shadow flitted across Richard Bosworth's face.

"Would you rather not stay, darling!" he suggested eagerly. "We can leave to-morrow."

But to this Patricia shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, no, we can't do that! I don't care to go to any provincial town, and it is impossible to return to London for a little while at least! We must just make the best of things. Fortunately, we are in for a spell of good weather apparently."

But when the morning came the weather had changed. It was pouring with rain, the wind had risen in the night, the outlook was dreary. The sea in the distance was white-foamed and running heavily.

There was a drop in the temperature too. The day before it had almost been too warm for fires; now the house seemed as if it could never be warm enough.

"How shall I endure it?" Patricia asked herself as she came back into her bedroom from the bathroom and again came and stood looking out of the window. "Good heavens! I shall go mad!"

Indeed she literally winced as she pictured the day in front of her, the day spent with Richard Bosworth hanging about her all the time, murmuring endearments, pouring out homage at her feet.

She ceded him all his good qualities—he was tender, gallant, sweet-natured, lovable; but he was most unintellectual.

He had read nothing; he knew nothing about music or art—nothing beyond soldiering, polo, hunting, racing. Books were sealed matters to him; and the war was something about which he could not or would not talk.

Patricia had half a mind to plead indisposition and to rest in her room, but even as this thought was coming to

her her maid told her that her husband's soldier servant wished to speak to her mistress, so Patricia went to the door.

Bluntly the man informed her that his master was ill, that he had fainted and was obliged to remain in bed.

"He did too much yesterday," the soldier said.

"I'll come to him when I'm dressed," said Mrs. Bosworth. She spoke coldly, resenting the man's words and manner. "Have you telephoned for a doctor?"

The servant shook his head.

"No; there is no need for a doctor. I know what to do for him; but he won't be fit for anything for another day or two. He sent his love and said you wasn't to be worried."

Patricia smiled.

"I am not worried," she answered. "Say I will be with him in a very little while."

Her spirits rose as she went back into her bedroom.

Now the wind and the high sea and the stormy weather appealed to her. They were in keeping with the restless burning impatience and spirit within her.

"Give me one of my thickest coats and skirts," she said to her maid. "I'll put on my brogues. I shall go for a long walk after breakfast."

"*She* isn't going to break her heart, no matter what happens to the Captain," was the maid's remark to herself.

But Patricia was perfectly indifferent as to what those about her might think or say. All she realized was that there might be a respite for her in this honeymoon period which was so wearisome, and which could have been so wonderful, so passing all description had she married Derrick Wynstaye.

CHAPTER XX

WYNSTAYE let two days go by before he broke the news to his wife that the time for separation was drawing very near.

Even then he would not have told her, for she was so amazingly, deliciously happy; but there were certain things which he had to see to and about which he had to speak to her, and then again it was better that she should be gradually prepared. To take himself away from her suddenly would perhaps sweep from her all her courage, make the burden of her life even heavier than it need be.

He took her out to lunch, and Angela decked herself out in all her prettiest things.

It was such a thrilling moment to walk with her husband —her husband!—into one of the fashionable crowded restaurants, to hear him give orders, to feel his hand steal towards hers under the table-cover, and to thrill with joy in the knowledge that this wonderful being, this handsome striking man, actually belonged to her, was her very own possession to be shared with no one!

To Wynstaye these little outings with his wife were productive of great amusement, tempered with a tender adoration, a sensation which he had never felt before.

He had started their lunch by ordering two cocktails, which, of course, Angela declared that she liked very much indeed, but she sipped hers with a wry face and coughed for a few seconds afterwards.

So her husband took it away from her and gave her water in its place.

"After all," he said, "these strong things are not for doves."

Angela laughed.

"You know I am not a dove, Derry," she said, "any more than I am an angel! Red-haired people are always supposed to have very bad tempers!"

"And a good job too!" observed Mr. Derrick Wynstaye. "I don't care a fig for a woman who hasn't a temper, though I am not a scrap afraid of yours!"

"Wait!" said Angela demurely.

Her husband was quick to notice how the eyes of other men rested upon her admiringly.

She had been pretty, and even striking, when he had met her first, but there was something more than mere prettiness about her now. She promised to be a beautiful woman, not in the style of coldly classical perfection as in Patricia, but with the warmth and the *séduisance* of a real live woman.

Wynstaye did not want her to be changed even in the slightest degree; and yet as he sat looking at her with all his love in his eyes he found himself wishing that she were not so young; he dreaded to leave her. His soul groaned in anguish as he pictured that day a week hence when he and this adored little wife of his would be so far apart.

"You are awfully quiet," Angela said to him; "and you are frowning dreadfully. Have I done something wrong? Perhaps you don't like my hat. I was just a little doubtful about it when I chose it, because mother wasn't with me. Mother has such adorable taste in dress! If only Maud would let mummy take her in hand she would be twice as attractive."

"I don't care about your hat one way or another," said Wynstaye. "It's you I'm thinking of. Oh, Angela," he said suddenly and with passion in his voice, "sometimes I almost wish I had never met you!"

She blanched and put down her fork with a trembling hand.

"Derry!" she faltered.

He took that trembling hand in his openly. What did it matter if they were surrounded? She was his and he was hers, why should they be ashamed of owning each other in public?

"Don't look so scared!" he said. "If you do I shall kiss you here before everybody. Of course I didn't mean what you think. I only mean you have brought so much

to me, you have made such a difference, the very thought of me without you takes the heart out of me."

Angela quickly caught the note of trouble, and she began to tremble.

"But, Derry darling," she said piteously, "that's not going to happen just yet awhile, is it?"

His hold on her hand became fiercer.

"One of the things I've promised myself I should find in you," he said, "is pluck! Didn't I tell you when we were at the farm that you were my mate? That means that you think with me, feel as I feel, and are as strong as a lion, although you look such a baby!"

Angela's face had whitened, even her lips were pale, but he felt her stiffen, and he noticed that her head, which had been drooping an instant before, was now thrown back proudly.

"When is it!" she asked him.

He told her the day quietly.

She closed her eyes for an instant, and then she opened them bravely.

"Well, we've got five more days," she said; "we can do such a lot of things in five days, Derry."

"Darling!" he breathed, and in truth he was proud of her. Not only proud, but touched to the core.

It was he who had no appetite for the luncheon when it was brought; but Angela pretended to be very hungry, and she chattered away in a light-hearted and amusing fashion.

If her lips quivered every now and then, and under the shelter of the table she gripped her two cold hands together more than once, she was resolved that he should not know this.

She put forth indeed the full beauty of her unselfish spirit to lift the cloud which she saw now was settling upon her.

They had discussed the possibility of going to a theatre, but when he asked her to choose which *matinée* they should attend she asked him, with just the faintest break in her voice, if there was not somewhere else they could go.

"I—I do love theatres," she said, "but somehow I

think I am a little tired of these revues, they are so noisy. One feels one ought to laugh all the time when perhaps there isn't anything to laugh at. Didn't you say, darling, that you had to go to see some one at one of the aerodromes ? "

" Yes. I must see this chap some time to-day. Would you care to come along ? "

She nodded her head.

" Rather ! Perhaps I shall see some one flying."

" Perhaps I'll take you up myself," said Wynstaye, at which she clapped her hands.

" Oh, Derry, will you ? Oh, do be a darling and take me ! I've always wanted to fly ! Why won't they let women join the Flying Corps ? "

He laughed heartily at this.

" No, no, my dear ! " he said. " You women are poking your noses into far too many places as it is ; we must keep some things to ourselves."

Just as they were about to leave the table a fine-looking man in khaki, with red tabs on his uniform, was coming down the big room.

He smiled and bowed as he caught sight of Angela, paused as if he would have spoken, and then passed on.

" Who's that johnny ? " inquired Derrick Wynstaye at once.

Angela was still smiling, and there was colour in her cheeks.

" Oh, that is Rex Rayburn ! I'm so sorry he didn't stop ; I would have introduced you. He's such a nice man, Derry ; I am sure you would like him."

Wynstaye's brows were contracted.

" I'm not so sure of that ! "

He turned to look after Captain Rayburn's retreating figure.

" Got a staff billet ! " he said. " Lucky beggar ! He belongs to the brigade that get all the cushy jobs going."

Angela took this up rather sharply.

" Oh, oh ! That isn't quite fair. I didn't know Captain Rayburn was on the staff ; it must have been a very

recent arrangement. He was out in France all last year, and he got the D.S.O."

"I don't want to hear anything more about Captain Rayburn," observed Mr. Wynstaye capriciously. "It seems to me you take a very great deal of interest in him."

"Yes, I do," said Angela. "Do you mind?"

He answered her promptly.

"Of course I do! I don't want you to take any interest in anybody except myself." As he paid the bill and went out of the restaurant he gripped Angela's arm. "You know, dear little person," he said, "I'm not really very difficult to understand. Don't make a hero of me, for I am nothing but a very ordinary person—a common or garden individual! I'm selfish, frightfully bad-tempered, and when I'm jealous——"

At this Angela laughed.

"Jealous!" she said. "That—that sounds absurd!"

"It isn't so absurd as it sounds," he answered her. He was pursuing this course of conversation because he could see only too plainly that the effort she was making to be unconcerned and happy was almost too much for her.

As he hailed a "taxi" and they drove away from the West End he snuggled his arm through hers and drew her closer to him.

"You won't be nice to any other man, will you, when I am gone?"

She said—

"Oh!" and then she bent her head. "I'm not going to look beyond the next five days," she said when she could speak. And then the tears came. "I didn't think it would be so soon," she said brokenly.

CHAPTER XXI

THE five days went by all too quickly.

Derrick Wynstaye had set himself the task of filling these days as full as they could be, in which he was seconded and aided by Mrs. Carter.

"I don't want her to sit down and think. And look here, Alice, you're going to promise me that you won't encourage her to be nervous or anxious. I hate her doing war-work, but at the same time it is about the best thing for her. And I like that Miss Masson who was here the other afternoon. There is something very sane about her. If Angela works with her she'll be all right."

"Of course you can't expect her not to fret a little, my dear. Just because she is bearing up so wonderfully now, she is bound to go to pieces when you've gone."

The man's face worked convulsively for a second or two; then he said as he walked to the window and stood looking out of it—

"I wouldn't say it to a living soul but you, Alice, but I'd give I don't know what to be able to stay here. Oh, I'll be all right when I get back yonder!" Then he drew a deep breath. "My God, what a change in me! It's queer, isn't it, what funny things there are just standing round the corner, as it were, that crop up in life and alter the whole course of a man's existence? One of these days, Alice," he said, "I'll tell you the story of a fool and his folly."

"Thanks, my dear!" said Mrs. Carter. "I'm not over-fond of fools, but if the story is about yourself it goes without saying that it will interest me. Perhaps," she added very quietly, "I know more of that story than you imagine."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I was a fairly blatant ass, so I suppose I let all

the world see what was going on. But look here, Alice, you're going to stay with my girl a few months, aren't you ? "

" I'll stay till your next leave, Derry."

" Well, I want you to give me a promise. It's just possible that some one may have a grudge against me and want to settle that grudge by getting at my wife. I want you "—his voice was a little hoarse—" to keep the world as far away as you possibly can from Angela. I may be all out, but it doesn't do to be too secure, and she means so much to me. She has brought me such extraordinary happiness it tortures me even to imagine that the slightest cloud could arise between us."

" The person you ought to speak to," said Mrs. Carter in her quiet way, " is not myself but your wife. I always believe in going to the bottom of things—you know that, Derry. And if you're afraid that somebody may want to do you a bad turn, why, you can take the sting out of that yourself by telling Angela the story you've promised to tell me."

He winced.

" I'd do it like a shot," he answered, " but there's just the chance she might not understand, and I daren't risk it—not now. If we were going to be together for some time it would be different." Then he drew his breath sharply and threw back his head. " But I'm not going to meet troubles before they come. Only I want to feel that you are looking after her—that you will be on hand when I'm not here to take care of her myself. She's got her own people, I know, but I put her specially in your charge."

There had come to Wynstaye, as there comes so often to a man, a sense of rage and even of humiliation in the remembrance of all the wasted faith and illusion he had sacrificed in the love he had given to Patricia Lessingham.

In truth, it was not often that he thought about her or let his mind revert to the past.

But the deeper Angela's hold on him grew the stronger those bonds—so exquisite, so heart-searching—of real devotion and affection, so unconsciously did the man

reproach himself for his blindness and deplore the wasted years. Where Patricia herself was concerned he had a kind of amused interest. Since those few very frankly-spoken words which had passed between them in the library at Peniston he had put the very last grain of personal resentment under his heel.

His anger was not for her but for himself. That she should have failed him was not nearly so maddening as that he should have failed himself.

But perhaps it was because of that last interview between them that he felt that it was extremely probable—despite her marriage—that Patricia might try to get even with him. He must have hit her pretty sharply, and there was nothing of the forgiving nature about her.

To rake up the past, to speak to his wife about what was done and over, was beyond him. His one task was to let Angela realize by every means in his power how truly, how absolutely he belonged to her, to bind her, if possible, still more closely to him.

And he succeeded !

They were so happy together those few short days, each one rivalling the other in keeping up their spirits and in bracing on their strength to meet their separation.

He refused to let Angela go to the station with him on the morning of his departure, but she drove half the way to it in the cab.

And when at last their hands had parted for the last time and her lips were burning with his farewell kisses Angela had left him and stood alone on the pavement watching the " taxi " whirl out of sight.

She was near the Park, and so she turned in there, walking almost mechanically, and, though the wind was cold, she sat down on the first seat she came to and then she closed her eyes.

She was too stunned to cry, the strain had been so intense. Ever since that moment when he had told her that his leave was to end Angela had not once been her real natural self. She had played her part magnificently—even at the last she had given him a smile. It was only now, as she sat

alone in the cold, damp and dismal Park, that the strength went out of her and she suddenly felt weary.

He had made her promise him that she would not go back to the flat that day.

"Go to your sister Honor, unless, of course, you would rather be with your mother."

Angela had promised to go to her sister.

"I know mother will be so upset, poor darling, and she will try not to let me see this. I think I would rather be with Honor."

But even to go to her sister was beyond her in this dark moment.

She could only sit with her two hands gripped together and sway to and fro whilst she tried to conquer the burning agony in her heart.

There were very few people abroad in the Park, but once a couple of wounded soldiers, crippled and looking very wan and ill, went slowly past her.

They brought to Angela not merely a pang of pity, but a sense of proportion. She told herself suddenly she was very selfish.

There she was sitting, claiming to herself that her grief was too great almost to be borne, and, after all, she was only one of thousands; at that very moment other women all over the world were putting on the mask of smiles and sending their men forth with gay words of courage.

"In a little while," she said to herself, "I shall be all right."

She watched those two poor crippled forms on which the khaki overcoats hung so loosely, and tears came into her eyes, not for herself, but for them and what they represented.

And then she looked down and all at once she remembered that he had slipped a little parcel into the bag she carried, laughing as he had done so.

"Something for my baby to open when she feels inclined," he had said.

She drew the package out slowly, and before she opened it she carried it to her lips.

It was as though he had left her a little bit of himself, and when the parcel was opened she found a neat leather case and inside it a lovely little watch on a black ribbon to fasten round her wrist.

When it lay in her hand and she turned it over Angela saw that there was something inscribed on the back.

"To my beloved wife—my comrade, my mate, the one woman in all the world for me.—DERRY."

By a supreme effort Angela kept back the passionate tears which surged up to her eyes.

The words called to her.

They swept away weakness, they sent iron into her veins. His comrade, his mate! That meant that she too must fight, she too must conquer!

She did not leave the Park till she knew that his train must have left the station some long while ago and was carrying him swiftly to the coast. She fastened the watch on her wrist and then she got up.

It was a long walk to Mrs. Bellares's studio; but Angela turned and faced the bleak wind determinedly. She would write to him when she got to Honor's, and she would tell him how like a spell his words had acted on her. She would be very careful. He must not have the slightest suggestion of that anguish of heart, that sense of hopelessness, which had fallen upon her just after they had parted.

She was his "mate," his "comrade." She would be both in spirit as well as in deed.

Angela was tired, but there was a glow on her cheeks when at last she found herself in Chelsea, walking towards the familiar block of studios.

Just before she came up to the door some one passed out and stood giving directions to the chauffeur of a motor-car.

It was Patricia Bosworth.

Angela drew back, and her heart beat a little quickly. She shrank from meeting any one in this hour; but from none more surely than from Richard Bosworth's wife.

But Mrs. Bosworth, glancing about her before getting

into her car, caught sight of Angela ; she paused just an instant and then she advanced with outstretched hand.

" How nice to see you ! " she said. " And how are you ? I needn't ask ; you look radiant ! "

" I've just walked across the Park," Angela answered.

" What energy ! No wonder your complexion is so wonderful ! By the way, I must congratulate you, Mrs. Wynstaye. I hope you will be very happy."

" I am happy," Angela answered her simply.

The flutter in her heart was dying out. She felt quite at her ease.

" It is a case for mutual congratulations," she added. " I wish you too every happiness."

" Thanks ! " said Patricia. She smiled faintly. " I'm afraid I've outgrown my illusions. As long as one jogs along pretty comfortably in this life and doesn't expect too much, I suppose one may be said to be happy. I've just seen your sister," she added. " I had to tell her that, to our regret, my husband will not be able to sit to her for some time. Yes, I am sorry to say he is ill. He cracked up most horribly when we were away, and I had to bring him back to London ; and now he's in a nursing-home."

She spoke quite unconcernedly, but a look of pain had flashed into Angela's eyes.

" Oh, I am so sorry ! " she said. " Poor Captain Bosworth ! What ill luck ! Will you please tell him from me how much I hope he will soon be better ? "

Patricia had smiled in the same faint way.

" I shall see him this afternoon, and I will certainly give him your message. I hope we are going to meet Mrs. Wynstaye. Do ring me up one morning ; let us lunch together. I hear from Mrs. Bellares that your husband has just gone back to France. I don't suppose you feel in the best of spirits, especially when one realizes how reckless Derry is and what risks our flying men have to take."

Angela looked at her with astonishing bravery.

" Oh, we mustn't think of risks and dangers ! " she answered. " We who stay at home must do something

more than that. I shouldn't be doing my share if I sat expecting disaster to come. I'm going to see only the bright side. Of course Derry will come back to me. I know, I *feel* he will come back!"

"Good-bye!" said Mrs. Bosworth. "You are going to be with your sister, of course. I can't drive you anywhere? Well, you will ring me up, won't you? And please send all sorts of kind messages from me to your husband when you write."

She got into the car, and shut the door with a sharp click.

She was hot with anger; there had been a rebuke in Angela's quietly-spoken words, and there had been something else. Perhaps Patricia realized as she drove to her splendid new home how wrong she was to regard this girl whom Derrick Wynstaye had married with contempt.

Perhaps she too realized something of the truth and grasped where the real charm of Angela lay.

"Derry was always a sentimentalist," she said to herself. "And she, of course, poor little fool, will put her hand in the fire if he tells her to do it!"

And yet, though she scoffed, she was full of burning envy.

And as she was carried in her luxurious car through the crowded streets she confessed to herself that this glimpse of Derrick Wynstaye's wife, the confession revealed so unconsciously by Angela that their marriage was to her at least a very wonderful thing, signified something exceedingly bitter and ugly for herself.

"Wife or no wife," she said to herself, "he belonged to me! Pretend as he will, he is not the man to forget!"

CHAPTER XXII

ANGELA had never had any occasion to stop and think very much about her own character. If she had been called upon to give a definition of herself she would probably have summed it up by saying that she was light-hearted, optimistic, and gifted with a vivid imagination, capable of doing anything in the world for those she loved and just as capable of disliking those who were hostile to her. But on the whole she would truthfully have declared herself to have been a very ordinary individual ; therefore it was with something like astonishment that she began to make discoveries in the days following on her husband's departure.

She found out, in the first place, that she had a great reserve of mental strength.

In the second that love could call forth from her far greater and deeper emotions than she had ever imagined she was capable of possessing.

And then she realized that she was brave. Not that she had ever really found herself lacking in courage, but her calm, proud, resolute determination not to sit down and let sorrow engulf her was really something of a revelation to herself. It certainly surprised her mother, who had confessed to her husband that she dreaded the days that would follow on Derrick Wynstaye's departure.

Angela's father had agreed with reservation.

" Of course the child is bound to be unhappy, that is natural ; but I think you will find that she will rise to the occasion. Angela will take sorrow as she has taken joy, in a different way from Honor. They are alike and yet so unlike. I believe Angela will develop into an unusually fine strong woman."

Mrs. Fayne repeated this to Angela when they were having tea together one afternoon. Derrick Wynstaye had been back at the Front nearly a month, and to the

outsider it might have seemed as if his wife had settled down philosophically to their separation; but Angela's mother could read beneath the surface. All she feared was that at times the girl exacted too much from herself, but she never shared this thought.

"I know what daddy means," Angela said in answer to her speech, "and I think I shan't disappoint him. You know, mummy dear, you were very good to give me red hair! One can never be tame or submissive or allow oneself to be trampled on if one possesses a head as red as mine. If I had been a man, how I should have loved fighting," she added.

Mrs. Fayne enjoyed paying these visits to Angela's flat. The mother and daughter were so happy together, and they felt at times like children playing with a wonderful doll's house.

"I simply cannot realize that you are married, Angela," said Mrs. Fayne on this occasion. "I ought to feel sure about it by now, but I am not, it is so strange."

"It is a bit strange," Angela confessed, "but," she added, with the colour flashing into her face, "it's true—beautifully true—all the same!"

She knelt down by her mother and put her head on Mrs. Fayne's shoulder for a moment.

"It was so dear and sweet of you and daddy to let us get married. You might have made so many difficulties. I don't believe anybody in the world has such nice parents as I have!" She paused, and then she asked wistfully, "And you do love Derry, don't you?"

Mrs. Fayne kissed her and laughed softly.

"Indeed I do!" she said. "I don't know when I have met any man I like so much. I was awfully fond of poor Chris Bellares, but my feeling for your 'boy' is quite different. There is something romantic about Derry—something so strong and yet so fascinating! If he sets himself out to win anybody or anything I am afraid he would always succeed."

Angela sat down on the floor, cuddled her knees, and looked up at her mother with shining eyes.

"Oh, I am very glad when I hear you speak like that! Because, you know, mummy dear, when I sit down to think about things quietly—and I have never had time till now to do that—I can explain to myself absolutely just why I married Derry in such a hurry, for I know my own heart, but of course I can't expect other people to feel and think about him as I do, can I? And I don't want to talk about him and discuss him with anybody but you and Honor—and, oh, daddy of course!"

Mrs. Fayne pressed her hand on Angela's beautiful hair.

"I understand, darling," she said; "and now that you have talked about your husband I am going to talk about mine. I am very anxious about your father, Angela."

"Are you?"

The girl was at once on the alert. She sprang to her feet and looked down on her mother in a troubled fashion.

"He is not ill, mummy dear, is he?"

Mrs. Fayne caught her breath and sighed, and then she said gently—

"I don't know, Angela, but certainly he has changed very much of late, and he is always so tired. I have urged him to give up this special constable duty, but he won't listen to me. Of course, my darling, you must realize that this terrible war falls, in a sense, heavier on us older people than it does on you boys and girls. There is no possibility of getting away from it. It hangs over us like a heavy cloud, no matter how much sunshine we try to put in our hearts."

"I wish you could both get away to some quiet spot for a time. There must surely be some quiet spots left in England," Angela said.

"What I have in my mind," said Mrs. Fayne, "is to give up the house. Several times lately Maud has said that she would like to have a little place of her own, and, after all, she is not a child now, and if she wishes to live by herself we cannot really object."

Angela wrapped her arms about her mother and held her very tightly in an embrace.

"Oh, how I wish I could give you everything in the

world you want ! " she said. " You don't know—you will never know—how I adore you, my precious mother ! " Then, as she released Mrs. Fayne, she added, " Now tell me more ; I believe you have a little plan already in your mind."

Mrs. Fayne confessed that this was the case.

" I am sure it would be better for your father if we could get into the country. We could only have some tiny place just a little way out where you could all of you come to see us without any great difficulty and we could still do some war-work in the country. I should like to have a garden, Angela."

" A lovely idea ! " said Angela gaily, though the very thought of losing her mother even in this manner struck a little pang to her heart. " Then we could all have our potatoes for nothing, and I could come down and dig, and you could keep hens, mother."

" Well, we could do these things in time, perhaps, but we should have to go slowly at first. And now I must hurry home. Oh, by the way, Angela, I quite forgot to tell you ! The other day I had an unexpected visit from Mrs. Bosworth. I had just come in, luckily, and Maud was at home too. She certainly is a beautiful creature, and she was very amiable. Maud is lunching with her to-morrow. They fraternized almost at once."

Angela shrugged her shoulders.

" They are welcome to one another," she said. Then she said : " But I do think you are right, mother. It will be better for you all if Maud is ' on her own.' I suppose, however, she will have to have some one to live with her—some chaperon, I mean ? "

" Oh, that would not be difficult for her to arrange," said Mrs. Fayne, " she has so many friends ! "

Then they talked a little bit about housekeeping, and Mrs. Fayne had a pleasant few minutes' chat with Mrs. Carter ; and then she took her leave. At the door she paused and looked a little wistfully at Angela.

" I am rather disappointed, darling," she observed, " that you don't like Mrs. Bosworth. She was really

charming to me. I thought it was nice of her to call."

Angela reproached herself quickly, and at once fell in with her mother's mood.

"It was nice, darling," she said; "and, if you like her, I don't see why you shouldn't see as much of her as possible. As a matter of fact she wants to come to see me, but I think I shall let that stand over for a little while. I haven't much time for paying or receiving calls."

"You are not doing too much orderly work, I hope, Angela," said her mother anxiously.

"I am doing all I can," Angela answered frankly. "I like to be busy all day; but I am not quite sure that I shall stay on, because Theo Masson is giving up the work, and I know that I should hate to be there without her. She is going out to a hospital in Paris. Sometimes I wish I could go too. I should be a little nearer Derry, shouldn't I? That is only an idea," she added gaily. "You see, I have this establishment to look after and any number of duties. I feel sometimes such an important person."

When her mother had gone Angela went back to her little drawing-room and stood looking out of the window. Spring was coming nearer every day; the sun was shining and the skies were blue, and there was a powdering of green on the branches of the trees.

She stood and looked away across the trees into the far distance, trying to visualize what her husband was doing at that moment, sending him, as she sent practically nearly every moment of her life, a tender thought and a prayer combined.

This was one of the days on which she had an hour or two free in the afternoon, but she was due to go back to her orderly duties almost directly; and she had slipped on her hat and coat and was about to start, when there was a sharp ring at the outer bell and her little maid brought in a telegram.

Just for an instant Angela's heart stood still; then it gave a great throb of relief as she took up the envelope and saw that it was addressed to Mrs. Carter. Neverthe-

less, as she sent the maid to carry it to its proper destination Angela found that she was trembling in every limb. Already she knew the dread significance of these innocent-looking envelopes brought by the telegraph-boys, and she found herself wishing, as many another wished in these days of hope and dread mingled, that there might be some other means found of letting those at home have news of the ones they love.

Mrs. Carter came to her looking worried and vexed.

"My dear," she said, "I am so sorry, but I am afraid I shall have to leave you for a day or two. This is from Gussie telling me that Katie has had a nasty accident."

She spoke of her two stepdaughters, pleasant, capable young women who helped her in the management of the farm.

Angela was full of sympathy.

"Of course you must go," she said. "Oh, I am so sorry! I do hope that this is not a bad accident. What can have happened? Aren't telegrams horrible? They say so much and so little. Now please don't worry about me, Alice dear; you know I can manage splendidly, and, thanks to you, everything has been started so well."

"I hate leaving you, my dear," Mrs. Carter said, "because I gave Derry a promise that I wouldn't do so; but I feel pretty sure that Gussie wouldn't have telegraphed for me if it were not rather serious."

"Oh, you simply must go!" Angela declared; and then she bustled about and helped Mrs. Carter to gather things together, and then she drove with her to the station.

The elder woman left numerous instructions with little Mrs. Wynstaye. She evidently regarded Angela in the light of a sacred charge and trust, and she fussed and fretted about this journey; in fact her feelings were divided, for she was very fond of her stepdaughters, and by this time she had grown equally fond of Angela.

But the girl stoutly declared that she was not to fret or to vex herself in the least.

"It was a great and wonderful thing to me to have you in the start of my housekeeping," she declared; "but,

after all, we must all stand on our own feet," she declared, "sooner or later, and I am going to astonish you, Alice. When you come back I shall show you how well I can keep house."

"You won't astonish me in the very least," said Mrs. Carter, "for I am quite convinced that you are one of the cleverest little creatures I have come across." Just as the train was starting she recalled something she had to say. "Oh, I quite forgot to tell you that this morning I had a letter from Hugo Fotherington—that is the elder son of Sir Gerald. The letter was forwarded on from the farm. He wrote to ask me if I could give him news of Derry and where a letter would reach him. Hugo is in London evidently home on leave, so I sent him a telegram this morning and told him where he could find me, and it is just possible that he may turn up at the flat."

"All right," said Angela, "if he turns up I'll be very nice to him and explain your absence."

"I wonder what he wants with Derry? If I remember rightly, they were never particularly fond of one another. It is some time since I saw Hugo, but he was extraordinarily good-looking as a boy. Well now, good-bye, my dear! Take care of yourself."

"Of course I will! Let me have news."

"I will probably send you a telegram; but if you don't get one you will hear from me to-morrow without fail."

Despite her brave assurance that she would be perfectly happy and would get along quite well by herself, Angela felt curiously depressed as she left the station.

Mrs. Carter had played such an important, though at the same time such an unobtrusive, part in her life, that it had required a separation to bring home to Angela the fact of how much she owed this old friend of her husband's and how comforting her presence had been. She was rather glad not to have to go directly back to the flat; indeed it was always a pleasure for her to be with Theo Masson.

There was a real affectionate friendship between these two young people, and Miss Masson, by right of her few years' seniority, took care of Angela in a way.

She had done everything in her power to cheer and raise the girl's spirits in the first few days after Derrick Wynstaye had gone back to the Front, and this had drawn them, if possible, closer in sympathy.

It was eight o'clock that evening before they left their work at the depot, and then they elected to walk a little way.

"I hope Mrs. Carter won't have to stay away longer than a few days," Miss Masson had said.

"I am quite sure she'll come back as soon as she can; but I shall manage all right. And then I've got mother and Honor and you."

Theo Masson hesitated a little, then she said—

"I am afraid you won't have me much longer, Angela. I'm leaving for Paris at the end of the week. All my arrangements are now made, and I am crossing with a contingent of English nurses; as a matter of fact," she added, "I am not going to the workrooms to-morrow. There is so much to see to."

Angela looked at her with something like consternation.

"Oh, Theo," she said, "I did not imagine you would be going so soon! I am so glad for your sake, but, oh, I am so sorry for my own!"

Miss Masson pressed her arm affectionately.

"Look here, Angela!" she answered. "I want you to give up the orderly work. It is altogether too heavy for you. You can do any number of other things just as useful and not so fatiguing. I was asked yesterday if I could recommend any of my friends for V.A.D. pantry-work for that new hospital which has just started in Park Lane. I don't know exactly what the duties are, but you wouldn't have to go every day as you do now, and you would be brought into contact with the patients, which would interest you."

Angela drew a little sharp breath.

"I certainly shan't stay on as orderly without you," she said. "How I do wish I could go to France with you! But I know—oh, yes, I know," she added quickly, "that that is quite out of the question!"

"Well, if I were in your place, with a dear little home like yours and a splendid husband who will be coming back to it very soon, I shouldn't want to move."

Miss Masson refused an invitation to go back and share Angela's little dinner.

"I should love it, darling," she said; "but the fact is I have so much to do this evening. Now, Angela," said Miss Masson, as they came to the point where they had to take farewell of one another, "be sure to look after yourself and let us meet to-morrow. We will discuss this V.A.D. work for you. I do not see why you shouldn't go down and stay with the Storringtons for a little while. Lady Bettina would be delighted to have you, and it would do you good."

But Angela shook her head.

"Oh, I couldn't go away!" she said. "You see, Derry told me, though I was not to expect him, he might arrive almost at any time. He seems to be doing something in connexion with some new thing which has been invented for aeroplanes. I don't know what it is," said Angela, "and I wouldn't dare ask questions, but I believe it is something very important. Certainly Derry was frightfully pleased because the authorities saw him once or twice on the matter and left certain arrangements in his hands. So, you see, he might be sent back here for a time."

"Wouldn't that be lovely?" said Theo Masson. "Oh, my dear, I do hope that he may come! Well, to-morrow I will be with you early in the afternoon."

It certainly was rather empty and lonely in the little flat without Alice Carter, but Angela set herself resolutely to be cheerful.

She first of all wrote her usual long letter to her husband; then she changed her dress and had a little chat on the telephone with her sister Honor.

Mrs. Bellares reported that Captain Bosworth had had his first sitting that morning.

"He only left the nursing-home three days ago, and he certainly didn't seem to me to be well enough to be out; but he is awfully keen on having his picture done."

"He is a dear," said Angela; "and I'm so sorry he is so seedy. Was she with him?"

"He came alone, but Mrs. Bosworth arrived in the middle of our sitting, and after that it was useless to go on. Isn't it wonderful, Angela, the way he adores her?"

"Very wonderful!" said Angela. "So wonderful that I simply can't understand it. You know she has called here twice, but I was out each time. I'm not sorry," Angela added; "I don't particularly want to see her."

And then the sisters discussed their parents' new plans.

"It will seem very strange not to have them in London," said Mrs. Bellares, "but I think mother is quite right to take daddy away; and, now that Maud has established herself in a little place of her own, it leaves them free to do what they like."

Then she spoke about her little boy. "Captain Bosworth met him to-day and they made great friends. I am afraid Chris is likely to be spoilt. What do you think Captain Rayburn sent him yesterday? A toy motor-car—a thing he can work himself when he is just a little older. I really shall have to scold Captain Rayburn. He is much too good to the child."

"I shouldn't scold him very severely, darling," said Angela. "I am sure he loves doing things for Chris and for you. But look here, Honor, I must see you! Will you give me supper to-morrow? Now that Alice is not here I'm rather glad to eat my meals with somebody."

She had finished her lonely dinner and was sitting at the piano in the drawing-room playing and singing when there came a ring at the bell and she heard her maid talking to some one.

Anxious to have news from Mrs. Carter, and imagining a telegram had come, Angela rose and went into the hall.

But there was no telegraph-boy. In his place she saw a tall man in khaki, and as she appeared her maid turned to her.

"Oh, if you please, ma'am," she said, "this gentleman wants Mrs. Carter's address!"

"I don't exactly want Mrs. Carter's address," said the visitor. "I really want to get an address from her."

"Are you Hugo Fotherington! I beg your pardon," Angela added quickly, "I should say Major Fotherington!"

He had saluted her as she had come into the hall, and now he smiled as he assented.

"Yes, I am Hugo Fotherington," he said. He hesitated just an instant, and then Angela explained the position.

"I am Mrs. Derrick Wynstaye," she said. "Won't you come in? Mrs. Carter went away rather suddenly to-day. She told me that she thought it possible that you might call."

He gave his cap and stick to the maid and followed her into the little drawing-room.

"I'd no idea that Derrick was married," he said. "But then we haven't been in touch with one another for some little time. It is very nice of you to receive me at this late hour, Mrs. Wynstaye. I suppose that Derrick is not at home?"

"He is out in France," Angela answered.

She brought forward a silver box and offered cigarettes to her unexpected guest.

"Do you allow smoking in this charming room?" he asked.

She nodded her head with a smile.

"Oh, yes; Derry smokes everywhere!"

Major Fotherington, as he lit a match, looked at Angela with undisguised admiration in his eyes.

"How long have you been married?" he asked as he flung the match away.

As she told him he made her a little bow and then said—

"Then I may still offer you congratulations. I am sorry not to see Derrick," he went on. "I wanted to meet him very particularly. Is there any chance of his getting back soon?"

Angela told him truthfully that she did not know.

"Though," she added, "I'm always living in hope. He went back about five weeks ago. I can give you his address, Major Fotherington."

He thanked her.

Angela had pushed forward a chair, but he did not sit down immediately. He stood in front of the fire-place.

Though the spring had come, it was still chilly enough at times and a fire was acceptable.

He glanced at the piano, and then he smiled at Angela.

"Did I hear you singing as I arrived?" Then he added, without waiting for her answer, "I am quite sure that you can sing, and I am also certain that you have a beautiful voice."

"That really is a bold statement!"

She laughed a little nervously. She could not help admiring him, for he was an extremely handsome man. In a sense he reminded her of her husband—they had the same dark eyes and tall well-built figures, but there was something different about Hugo Fotherington. His features were not so fine; in particular his mouth was weak.

Angela felt almost sorry that she had asked him to come in.

The thought rushed swiftly through her mind that perhaps this was something which her husband might not have wished her to do. At the same time, it would have been very strange if she had not shown some courtesy to one who was now a kinsman of her own by marriage.

But she did not particularly like the way in which Major Fotherington looked at her, and so she turned to the piano with a sensation of relief.

"I do sing a little," she said, "and I promised Derry that I would practise every day if I could possibly find time."

She sat down at the piano as she spoke and ran her fingers over the keys.

"You are going to sing for me now?" remarked Major Fotherington. "That is awfully good of you. I adore music—that is to say, I like tuneful music; I am afraid I am not very highly artistic."

"I only sing ballads," Angela replied.

She sang two by Reynaldo Hahn and then an English song.

Hugo Fotherington listened with real appreciation, and as he did so he glanced about him, and a feeling of envy took possession of him. This charming room, so fragrant, so homelike, was a fitting setting for its young mistress with her red-gold hair and rose-leaf skin. He asked himself bitterly why Derrick should have so much and he so little.

A long time ago Derrick Wynstaye and he had agreed to go their separate ways.

They had never liked one another, and it had been perhaps one of the most disagreeable of young Derrick Wynstaye's many new experiences after his father's death that he should be forced to realize that his guardian's sons were not disposed to be pleasant to him.

That is to say, the second son, George, and the youngest —whose untimely death had dealt Sir Gerald Fotherington such a heavy blow—were not inimical to him ; as a matter of fact Derrick got very fond of the little boy who had been a "snotty" on the *Hogue,* and they kept up a correspondence almost to the boy's death. But from the very first there had been a kind of veiled hostility between himself and the elder of Sir Gerald's sons.

By the natural law of things it should have been Derrick who nurtured jealous feelings, for Hugo Fotherington had possessed everything which Derrick had lost in so drastic and unhappy a fashion, but in reality it was Hugo Fotherington who was the jealous one.

Although Sir Gerald never showed any great warmth of feeling for young Wynstaye and had, as has been stated, put his foot down resolutely on the boy taking up the life which his own father had planned for him, there had been elements in Derrick's character which appealed to him—elements which were wholly lacking in his own elder son, and many a time—though Derrick was not aware of this—Sir Gerald had held up his ward as an example when called upon to remonstrate with Hugo.

It can therefore be easily imagined that there was no love in Hugo's heart for Derrick Wynstaye even as boys. When they were a little older they had, as Derrick Wynstaye would have put it, "come up against" one another on

various occasions, and these little encounters did not serve to make them any the more sympathetic to one another.

It would certainly have been a surprise, and not a pleasant one, to Derrick could he have seen Major Fotherington seated at his ease in Angela's dainty little drawing-room listening to her singing.

He might have wondered a great deal more at the reason that had brought this other man in search of him after having carefully avoided him for so long.

When she had finished singing her third song Angela got up, and Major Fotherington at once sprang to his feet.

"I don't know how to thank you, Mrs. Wynstaye," he said. "I was feeling most awfully blue this evening. It has been simply delightful to be allowed to meet you."

"I must give you my husband's address," said Angela, and she went to her writing-table and scribbled it on an envelope.

"I suppose you will be writing to him to-morrow?" Major Fotherington inquired, with a faint smile.

She answered promptly.

"Yes, and of course I shall tell him that you came. I suppose there is nothing that I can do? Derrick left me certain things to look after when he went away."

"It is most awfully good of you," said Major Fotherington, and he put warmth into his voice, "but I am afraid I have already encroached too much on your kindness. I will write to Derrick." He held out his hand. "Good night!" Just as he was turning away he paused. "Have you met my father, Mrs. Wynstaye?"

Angela shook her head.

"No; Sir Gerald was very kind to us at the time of our marriage. He sent us a splendid present, and he wrote Derrick a charming letter. He has invited us to stay with him."

"I am sure my father will be enchanted to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Wynstaye. Good-bye once more!" He gave a little sigh. "It is very sweet and homy here," he said. "Derrick is a lucky chap!"

After he had gone Angela sat looking into the fire in rather troubled fashion.

She found herself regretting, and that in no uncertain fashion, having met Hugo Fotherington, and she even reproached herself for having done something that was perhaps a little unconventional.

On the other hand—as she swiftly began to argue—how could she possibly have avoided asking Major Fotherington to come in when once she had met him? She only wished Alice Carter had not been called away. No telegram had arrived from the farm, and Angela felt anxious, especially as it would not be possible for her to receive a letter by the first post; moreover, the transitory presence of this other man in her little home brought back to her that poignant longing for the man she loved.

The place seemed suddenly cold and empty, just as it had been in the first two or three days after Derrick had gone.

Angela called to her little maid and told her to lock the door and go to bed, and then she walked restlessly about her drawing-room, extinguishing the lights herself, covering up the furniture, closing the piano, and putting away her music.

Though she was tired, she did not feel sleepy, and, in fact, when she was in her bedroom and had made ready for bed she suddenly found herself overwhelmed with a kind of crushing sorrow which broke ruthlessly through the spirit of fortitude which she had girded on so bravely. Crouched up in an arm-chair in front of the fire, she wept long and bitterly.

CHAPTER XXIII

NEWS came through from Mrs. Carter in the next two or three days. It was not good news.

Her stepdaughter, who had been bicycling to the neighbouring town, had met with an accident—had come into collision with a motor-car, had been flung off her bicycle, and, it was feared, was very badly injured.

"It grieves me beyond measure," Mrs. Carter wrote, "to be obliged to tell you, my dear, that I must stay here for a time. Poor Katie has not yet recovered consciousness, and we are very anxious about her. Gussie is awfully brave, is taking on all the work, and is trying to keep up her spirits—a tough job, for she and Katie are devoted, as you know. I am myself writing to Derry."

Then followed a long list of injunctions as to what Angela was to do with regard to the house and with regard to herself.

Angela sent back an answer immediately, and wrote it in as cheery a spirit as possible.

At the end of her letter she scribbled a few words about Major Fotherington.

"At first he reminded me tremendously of Derry, but I soon saw that they are not a scrap alike. I am not sure that I care about him. However, I'm not likely to see much of him, so that doesn't matter."

In fact in about a couple of days' time Angela had forgotten all about Major Fotherington.

But evidently Major Fotherington had not forgotten her, for when she came in one late afternoon the third day after he had called she found her little maid in a great state

of excitement, filling vases and glasses with a profusion of lovely flowers.

They had been sent in during the afternoon with Major Fotherington's card attached.

Angela could not resist a thrill of admiration and delight for the roses, the carnations, and other costly blooms, but she felt vaguely annoyed that they should have been sent by this particular man and she wrote him a quite formal little note expressing her thanks.

Occupied with placing the flowers about her drawing-room, Angela overlooked a note which had been also sent by hand.

She frowned a little as she took it up and recognized her sister Maud's handwriting.

Miss Fayne wrote to ask her to go round and have tea with her that afternoon.

Just for an instant Angela hesitated, and then she decided to accept the invitation.

Perhaps it was her imagination, but she seemed to read a little touch of loneliness in Maud's words ; anyhow, with her quick sympathy, Angela resolved to make herself as pleasant as possible.

When she decided on leaving her parents Miss Fayne had taken a small furnished flat in a much more fashionable neighbourhood than that in which her old home was situated.

Angela had imagined that she would have found her sister alone, but when she was ushered into the drawing-room—a long low-roofed apartment rather fantastically furnished—there were at least four people having tea with Miss Fayne.

Maud was looking very handsome ; she seemed to have lost that fretful, restless expression which had characterized her for so long. She was wearing a picturesque kind of gown which suited her extremely well.

The sisters kissed each other, but without very much show of affection, and then Angela found herself shaking hands with Mrs. Bosworth and being introduced to the others present.

She sipped her tea and sat in a chair, feeling like a stranger, while Maud chatted and laughed with her guests. After a while they melted away, all but Patricia Bosworth, with whom Miss Fayne had evidently struck up a very real friendship. They were talking about people and things in an intimate fashion, and they began at once discussing the arrangements for the evening.

Angela listened with a certain amount of surprise and, as her confidence was gradually restored, with amusement too.

Suddenly Mrs. Bosworth turned to her.

"Why shouldn't you come with us to-night, Mrs. Wynstaye? I am perfectly convinced you have no engagement." She laughed lightly. "You see, I am a thought-reader."

Maud seemed at first a little taken back by the suggestion, then she turned to her sister also.

"Yes, why not come, Angela? We are going to dine at the Ritz, and we are going on to the Palace later."

"I'll send the car for you," said Mrs. Bosworth, "and of course we shall see you safely home. Now don't say 'No!'" she added, and she put a very charming note in her voice. "I'm quite convinced that you are prepared to sacrifice yourself and to deny all pleasure just because you think that this will please Derry, but you mustn't spoil your husband. Derry is only human, like every other man, and that means that he is very selfish. Now confess you were going to do nothing this evening but spend a lonely few hours and then go to bed early!"

Angela laughed.

"Yes, that is just what I am going to do," she said; "but please don't pity me, because I simply love what you call my lonely hours. I get awfully tired by the time night comes. For instance, I have been doing no end of things to-day, that is why you see me in this get-up, Maud. I spent the whole morning with mother helping her to pack, then I went on to Theo Masson and did the same for her, also I verily believe I've walked miles to-day," Angela nodded.

"All the more need that you should have a jolly evening! Now don't refuse me!"

At that moment the door was opened and Captain Bosworth was announced.

His wife turned to him and gave him a smile.

"Just in time, Dick! Please persuade Mrs. Wynstaye to throw over a solitary evening and come and share one with us."

"Why of course! Do come!" said Richard Bosworth, as he shook hands with Maud and then with Angela. He sat down beside the girl, and her heart warmed towards him, though there was a pang through it at the same time.

There was something so winning, so delightful about him; but Angela thought he looked very ill.

"I think," she answered, "that it would do you far more good to come and spend a quiet evening with me."

Mrs. Bosworth frowned even as she laughed.

"Oh, dear me, no, Mrs. Wynstaye, that will do not at all! Dickie gets far too depressed as it is; he must be roused. Besides, he is the host to-night—you know he can't be spared!"

"Do come!" said Richard Bosworth again, and he looked pleadingly into Angela's eyes.

He had noticed, as the girl did, that his wife was vexed.

She stood in front of the fire chatting apparently most amiably with Miss Fayne, but already her husband had learnt to know the meaning of certain inflections in her voice, the significance of certain expressions.

"I was talking about you to Mrs. Bellares to-day," he said to Angela, "and she told me that she thought that you spent far too much time by yourself."

"I am absolutely happy!" Angela assured him, and there was a look in her eyes, a sound in her voice, which assured him she was speaking the truth. He caught his breath with a little sigh.

"Then there is no more to be said, is there?" he remarked. "But, if you won't come to-night, perhaps you'll come some other time."

Maud came across the room to her sister.

"Oh, Angela, be sociable for once! We don't often go out together, and I am perfectly convinced Derrick won't object. If he makes a fuss I'll write to him and explain."

"Or I will," added Mrs. Bosworth, with a strange little laugh.

Angela's heart was beating quickly, and she felt, with a rush of colour to her cheeks, that to stand out any longer or to make any further protest would be perhaps to bring a little ridicule upon her husband.

"Well, it is very sweet of you all," she said. "Thank you! I shall be delighted! What time is the dinner? If it is very early I think I ought to go home now, because, of course, I have to dress."

"Dick, take Mrs. Wynstaye home! You can come back for me, and of course we shall call for Maud and for Mrs. Wynstaye a little later."

The big car waiting below carried them quickly to Angela's flat.

They talked as if they were old friends.

Mrs. Chatfield was not in London. Angela had only seen her twice since her marriage, and she was eager to have news of Captain Bosworth's sister.

It appeared that the sailor husband had obtained sick leave and had had to go into a nursing-home in Edinburgh for a slight operation.

Angela noticed that more than once on that swift drive homeward Captain Bosworth coughed; a hard, hacking cough. The sound hurt her and she reproached him for not having on his warm overcoat.

"You know the wind is bitterly cold to-day," she said, "although the sun has been so bright. These splendid days are very treacherous."

He flushed a little.

"Oh, I'm all right!" he said. "I hate to fuss too much." There was a pathetic confession in his next words. "It is so beastly for Pat to have me always crocking up and being ill. If you want to do me a good turn, dear Mrs. Derry, you'll tell her that you think I am looking ever so fit when we meet to-night."

"I can't tell untruths," Angela answered him bluntly, adding, "If you belonged to me I should *make* you fuss about yourself."

She regretted the words the moment she had uttered them. They seemed to carry a definite reproach; but if they hurt Richard Bosworth he was far too loyal to let this be seen, and Angela felt she liked him just a little bit better than before.

Mason helped her mistress to dress eagerly.

"I hope you won't be lonely here by yourself," Angela said just as she was about to descend in the lift, the message having been brought up that Captain Bosworth's car was waiting down below.

The girl assured her that she would be perfectly all right by herself, but as it happened her mother was coming to see her that evening.

The car was empty, but the orders were that they were to call for Miss Fayne and then go on for Captain and Mrs. Bosworth.

Something of Angela's merry light-hearted spirits came back to her as she looked at her sister.

Evidently Maud was resolved on adopting a very uncommon mode of dressing. There was a futuristic suggestion about the wrap she wore and the way her hair was dressed. At the same time Angela had to confess she looked extremely attractive.

"I am glad you were sensible," Maud remarked as they were carried swiftly through the streets to the Bosworths' house. "I don't think it does anybody a scrap of good to sit down and be miserable."

"Certainly not, if they are miserable!" said Angela. "The strange fact remains that I am perfectly happy when I am by myself." Then she laughed. "That isn't a very complimentary remark, I am afraid. Please forget it! I assure you I think it awfully good of you and Mrs. Bosworth to bother about me at all. You like her very much, I see."

"Of course I like her!" said Maud in her sharp way. "She is not only about the best-looking woman I have ever

met, she is extremely clever—got a head on her shoulders, the sort of woman who can do anything or be anything. The only thing that surprises me about her," said Miss Fayne a little later, " is that she should have married the man she has. I suppose it was because of his money. But he is such a feeble specimen of humanity. To my mind he looks consumptive ! "

Angela bit her lip sharply.

To have spoken out what was in her mind would have been to have provoked a quarrel.

It was the Maud of old who was speaking—the Maud so intolerant, so secure in her own physical well-being, and so utterly lacking in charm.

But a little philosophy came to Angela. After all, she was out to have a pleasant evening, and she certainly would not make things very agreeable if she started an argument with Maud ; but more than once during that evening Angela found herself regretting that she had agreed to accept this invitation.

Her heart contracted, for instance, when Mrs. Bosworth suggested in the calmest way possible that her husband should sit beside the chauffeur, as he would crowd up the car.

Captain Bosworth was in uniform, but without an overcoat, and he coughed repeatedly as they were carried swiftly through the chilly night air.

" If I were to listen to Dickie's sister," Mrs. Bosworth remarked, " I should keep him wrapped up in cotton wool the whole time. I don't believe in coddling any man, and I don't believe in letting Dick imagine that he is a permanent invalid. I suppose you find him looking wretchedly seedy," she added, turning to Angela rather unexpectedly.

The girl caught her breath and then made her plunge.

" On the contrary," she said, " I think Captain Bosworth is looking ever so much better." To herself Angela said, with a little spasm of pain, " God forgive me ! "

Fortunately, at that moment Maud began to talk, and the rest of the drive was occupied entirely by the other two exchanging views and gossips.

At the Ritz, Angela found that various other people were expected to dine with the Bosworths.

A little mist of unshed tears came over her eyes as she passed into the dining-room.

Once she and Derry had had luncheon here. She closed her eyes as she passed the table at which they had sat ; somehow this brilliantly-lighted place, with its clatter and gaiety, its laughter and music, brought back the actuality of his presence almost painfully clear.

As they were sitting down to the table Captain Bosworth spoke to his wife.

" Dundas can't come, but I've been lucky enough to find another chap. You know Hugo Fotherington, don't you ? "

" Oh, of course ! " Patricia sent a smile over her husband's shoulder to the smart good-looking man who was coming towards her.

" So glad to see you again," she said, " and awfully glad that you were able to accept a very short invitation ! Where will you sit ? Miss Fayne, may I introduce Major Fotherington ? "

She named two or three other women, and then, as her eyes rested on Angela, a sudden thought flashed through her mind.

" Oh, you must be introduced to your new relation ! Mrs. Wynstaye, this is your husband's—what is it, cousin ? " she queried.

Major Fotherington dropped into a seat beside Angela.

" Mrs. Wynstaye and I are already acquainted," he said.

Patricia Bosworth's eyes narrowed slightly, but she was still smiling.

" Oh, then that is all right ! " she said. " I can rely on you to look after Mrs. Wynstaye."

Major Fotherington scarcely heard her. He was glancing with undisguised admiration at the slim white-robed figure beside him, and that curious touch of grudging envy for Derrick Wynstaye possessed him anew.

Angela smiled at him faintly and coldly.

She was thoroughly annoyed now, and all the pretty frankness and freshness of manner which had made her greeting of him the other night so spontaneous—was missing now ; a fact of which Hugo Fotherington was very quickly aware and which stung his vanity sharply.

Just because he knew that Angela was not in the least pleased to meet him again he resolved to pay her the most marked attention.

" Derrick has evidently told her to give me the cold shoulder," was what he said to himself, and his anger and dislike for the other man shut his eyes to the possibility that even so young a creature as Angela needed no warning or injunction from any one, but that her own instinctive sense of prudence, that quick intuitive grasp of character which makes for protection, could teach her it were better to keep this man out of her intimate life.

CHAPTER XXIV

LETTERS had been coming through very freely from France, and, difficult as it must have been for him to write daily, yet Wynstaye had not missed once since he had gone back to send his wife at least a few words.

These letters had not always been delivered so regularly as they had been written, and on those days on which the post failed to bring her anything Angela—despite all her strength of mind and proud determination not to meet trouble half-way—was really miserable, consequently it can be well imagined how wretched she was when at least four days went by without bringing her the cherished remembrance from her husband.

Both Mrs. Fayne and her sister Honor were full of consolatory explanation.

Derrick must have been unable to write, was what they said, or if he had written he had found it impossible to get the letter to the post. Possibly, too, he had been extraordinarily busy. Every argument which affection and eager desire to comfort could suggest was put forward, and Angela tried to smile, but in reality her heart lay like a cold thing in her breast.

She dreaded the sound of the electric bell when she was in the flat ; the thought of a telegram coming was so terrifying. She could not bring herself to read the papers or glance at the casualty lists. She told herself over and over again that she was *not* brave, nor was she strong, that in fact she was a coward ! But oh ! she yearned just to have a few pencilled lines from the man whom she now loved with a passionate and an adoring love !

Sometimes in those anxious days the thought crossed Angela's mind that perhaps Derry was cross with her. For she had not yet received an answer to her letter telling him of Hugo Fotherington's unexpected appearance on the

scene, and now she knew, not merely by what Mrs. Carter had told her or by instinct, but by various other reasons, that the news about Major Fotherington would have been very displeasing to Wynstaye, so perhaps he was vexed. That supposition was so hard to bear that Angela put it from her as speedily as possible. Even in her trouble—and undoubtedly Mrs. Carter was very much distressed about her stepdaughter—Derry's faithful friend found time to write to his wife and give her a little warning.

"I hope you will not be bothered by Major Fotherington," she wrote, "but I gather from your letters that he is very much resolved on cultivating your friendship. But, my dear child, there really is no occasion to worry. Derry will have had my letter by this time, and so of course he will know that it is not by your choice that you have come in contact with Hugo Fotherington. You are, however, following the right course—avoid meeting this man as much as you possibly can, and let him clearly understand that you have no wish to regard him as anything but a stranger. I suppose he has not told you what he wanted of Derry?"

No, he had given Angela no explanation whatever, but he had vaguely suggested that he was troubled about some matter which had considerably annoyed his father, and she gathered from this that he had resolved to discuss this matter with her husband and perhaps ask his advice.

She liked him less on meeting him again. He certainly was good-looking and attractive, but, without prejudice on her part, she felt instinctively that he was not a man to be trusted or admitted to friendship.

Apart from this, Angela resented the curious way in which Mrs. Bosworth seemed to find amusement and interest in watching Major Fotherington and herself.

As they had stood in the hotel entrance waiting for their cars after dinner Mrs. Bosworth had exchanged just a few words with Fotherington.

"Pretty little creature, isn't she?" she had remarked, glancing at Angela.

Major Fotherington had nodded his head.

"Unusually pretty—in fact she is something more than that. When she has developed she will be beautiful!" Then he had laughed in none too pleasant a fashion. "Much too good for Derrick!" he had observed. And then Patricia Bosworth remembered many things which had become dim in her recollection.

She recalled how, at odd times when discussing Derrick's connexion with the Fotheringtons, she had heard him speak contemptuously of Sir Gerald's elder son. "Hugo is an out-and-out wrong 'un," he had said once, "and a bounder too! I can't think why he should be so different from the rest of his people, but the fact remains he is."

Major Fotherington's next few words had set Patricia thinking sharply.

"Yes, she is a fool to have thrown herself away on Derrick, but she is evidently infatuated with him, and that is why, I suppose, she feels that she must treat me coldly. She was awfully nice the first time we met, but to-night she is a little icicle. I can't get two words out of her."

Mrs. Bosworth laughed.

"Oh, what rubbish!" she said. "Why, can't you see she is only shy? We must make allowances for her. I must say it is a new thing for Derrick Wynstaye to care about such unsophistication; he always seemed to like brainy women, but——" She shrugged her shoulders and then said, "She has to grow up and has everything to learn. Give her a little time and she will probably develop other qualities besides the beauty you prophesy. To my mind," Patricia added, rather giving herself away, "I find her sister, Maud Fayne, infinitely better-looking; besides, she is a woman of the world. There is nothing namby-pamby about her!"

Major Fotherington only smiled, but he saw the flush on Mrs. Bosworth's face, and he knew that Angela had no friend in this brilliant beautiful woman, and he gave a passing thought of sympathy to Angela, for Patricia Bosworth's enmity could very easily be no empty thing. But, later that night, after they had separated and Captain Bosworth

had driven Angela home, Hugo Fotherington was conscious of feeling decidedly annoyed and ruffled.

It was so evident to him that Derrick Wynstaye's wife had firmly, yet with no discourtesy, given him to understand that she desired him to remain outside her life.

He was a man who did not easily forgive a slight, and so as he sat smoking and talking and laughing in Mrs. Bosworth's delightful lounge—they had all gone on to her house after the theatre except Angela—he was telling himself doggedly and with a spice of malice that it would give him the greatest pleasure in the world to teach Derrick Wynstaye's young wife a little lesson. Consequently he allowed a brief time to elapse, and then he began his attack on Angela.

He was a man who had had great success with women, and he flattered himself that it would not be a very difficult matter for him to thaw the cold resolve with which Angela had armed herself.

When he called he was careful not to go alone. He had given luncheon to Mrs. Bosworth and Miss Fayne, and it was the most natural thing in the world to escort Maud to her sister's flat.

He knew that Angela would be at home, because he had heard the sisters arrange this little meeting when they had been at the theatre ; but if he had flattered himself to take Derrick's wife unawares and so surprise her into being more amiable he had made a mistake.

She received him very coldly and made it so palpable that she had no pleasure in his presence that he took his departure after he had been there scarcely more than a quarter of an hour.

Major Fotherington had quite easily enlisted Maud Fayne's sympathy on his side. Just by an expressive little shrug of his shoulders and a glance, he had appealed to her, as it were, and Maud was not slow to take up the cudgels on his behalf after he had gone.

" What *is* the matter with you, Angela ? " she had queried irritably. " Perhaps you are not aware of it, but you were awfully rude to Major Fotherington."

" I know I was. I meant to be. I don't like him,"

Angela answered quite frankly, "and I was not pleased to see him."

This time it was Maud's turn to shrug her shoulders.

"My dear child," she said, "you must grow up! You simply can't go through life behaving like a schoolgirl! Even if you don't like Major Fotherington, though I can't understand why you don't, there are ways of being tactful —you need not treat him as if he were a pariah!"

"I have tried to let him know I don't like him, and I think it was odiously impertinent of him to come here with you to-day. If I have annoyed him I'm glad, but I think he is too thick-skinned to take a hint."

Miss Fayne looked at her disapprovingly.

"Well, you need not see him again if you don't want to."

"I certainly shan't if I can help it!" Angela retorted. There was a hot colour in her cheeks. "It was mean of him to make use of you!" she said.

Maud looked at her quickly and her lip curled.

"Oh," she said, "if there is something mysterious between you!"

At this Angela flashed into a rage.

"Don't be beastly, Maud!" she said. "There's nothing mysterious about the matter. I just don't like this man. It may be bad taste on my part, but I don't!"

Miss Fayne shrugged her shoulders.

"It seems a pity to start out snubbing your husband's people."

"I'm only trying to snub one person. Even if he is a connexion of Derry's, that won't make any difference, for I know that Derry and he hate one another like poison."

"Oh," said Maud, "*now* I've got to the bottom of things!" She laughed. "Well, my dear Angela," she remarked, "when you are a little older and have been married a little longer you will realize how absolutely foolish it is to let your husband order you about as if you had no strength of character or will of your own."

"I dare say I shall be ever so much wiser in a little while," said Angela, and then she tried to smile. "Let's change the subject. You haven't really seen my home

yet. You know, Maud, it wasn't finished that night when you dined here with mummy and daddy. I want to show you a darling old writing-bureau which Mrs. Carter has sent me from the farm. It must be years and years old, and I simply love it!"

Miss Fayne allowed herself to be taken from one room to the other and showed a mild appreciation, but she did not evince any enthusiasm.

"It is very cramped here," she said. "I must have air and space. Oh, yes, I grant you have got a very good view, but the rooms are terribly small!" And then she bestowed a little praise with an attempt at graciousness.

"But everything is beautifully kept, Angela. And you've only got one maid? I don't know how you manage it. She must be a treasure!"

"She is a good little soul, is Mason," Angela answered, "but I do a lot myself. I always clean all the silver, and I wash all the china, and I wash other things too. This blouse I've got on, for instance; I washed and ironed that myself. I simply adore doing these things! Of course Mrs. Bosworth wouldn't believe me, but I would a thousand times rather wash and iron a blouse than have a dinner at the Ritz and go to a theatre."

"I never supposed you had a domestic turn of mind," said Maud, "but no doubt having your own home makes a difference."

Angela's eyes shone.

"All the difference in the world!" she said.

Just as Miss Fayne was going the postman put a letter in the box. It was a letter from the Front, and Angela pounced on it and then turned pale as she saw that the writing was not her husband's.

"I haven't had a letter for four days," she said, "and now this is not from Derry!"

"You mustn't fret!" Maud said, and she spoke with unusual kindness. Perhaps her heart was touched by the pathetic look of that pale young face and by the nervous trembling which ran through Angela.

She kissed her sister almost affectionately.

GIRLS COLLE

"Shall I open if for you?" she asked.

But Angela shook her head.

"Oh no!" Then she scanned the pencilled name in the corner of the envelope.

"Oh, this is from Mr. Storrington!" she exclaimed. "Now I am sure something has happened!"

Her hands trembled so much she could hardly open the envelope, and she had to sit down.

Miss Fayne waited, watching her anxiously and just a little awkwardly—all emotion was so foreign to Maud.

When she had read the first page Angela looked up at her sister.

"Derry is in hospital. He is not badly hurt—not bad enough to be sent back to England. Mr. Storrington says that he will be all right again in a little while. He doesn't tell me what happened."

Then the pent-up anxiety and veritable anguish which had tortured Angela these last four days burst forth.

"Oh, this horrible, this ghastly war!" she said. "If it only would end! I know I shall lose Derry! Why don't they let him come back to England to be taken care of? It is such a horrible idea that he should lie in a hospital to be patched up just to send him out again, perhaps to his death!"

Maud Fayne looked a little shocked. She considered this outburst theatrical.

"After all," she said, "they can't make differences, and he is only one of many. No doubt if Derrick had been very badly wounded they would have sent him to England. That ought to be your consolation."

"I suppose it ought," said Angela, "but it isn't. I don't want that sort of consolation. I want Derry. I want to be with him when he is ill and suffering."

Then she conquered herself with a great effort and tried to smile.

"Sorry," she said; "I don't often let myself go in this fashion, but one must let off steam occasionally. Do you want a 'taxi'? We can ring down and tell the man to get you one."

"Thanks, but I'll walk a little way!" Maud answered. "I wouldn't leave you, only I'm dining out very early this evening. Why don't you go over to Honor's?"

"Oh, I'm best by myself, thank you!" Angela answered. "Don't worry about me."

After the door had closed behind her sister she found herself laughing bitterly.

"Worry about me," she said. "That was a very needless piece of advice."

Then she sat down and read and re-read Edward Storrington's letter. It was very kindly worded and went straight to the point, and, though she had refused to recognize anything comforting in the fact that he was kept in hospital out at the Front, when Maud suggested this she did draw consolation from this fact, for she knew that if he had been very badly hurt or injured he would certainly have been sent home.

Nevertheless her anxiety and her grief were very sharp.

She had told her sister that she preferred to be by herself, but after a while the solitude oppressed her; she could not stay in the flat, neither did she feel that she could go to Mrs. Bellares.

It was not thought of herself that intervened to prevent this—she did not want to revive sad memories.

But Angela was very restless, so she put on her things and went out.

It was a beautiful evening. There had been a cold wind during the day, but now the wind had vanished. The evenings were drawing out; the streets were crowded, the omnibuses overfull.

Angela made her way to the Park. She could find a little corner somewhere where she would be by herself, and fight against a very natural desire to let herself go. It was always the memory of her husband's faith in her which sustained; his pride in her courage which gave her strength to meet trouble as she considered his "mate" should meet it. But it was a very tough struggle this night. She felt in a little while that she had done wisely in coming out. And then she loved the Park. It was hallowed to her by the remem-

brance of that never-to-be-forgotten day, that wonderful hour when Derrick had told her how much he loved her and had asked her to be his wife.

She carried Mr. Storrington's letter with her ; when she got home she would write to him. A letter would reach him just as quickly as a telegram, perhaps quicker.

Sitting under the trees with that letter crushed in her hand, Angela kept back the tears bravely.

Few people passed her, but after a while she became conscious that she was an object of interest to two very small children, who were standing a little way off staring at her in a fixed and embarrassing manner.

Some distance away an older child—though she too was very young—was calling to them in a shrill voice, but they did not move. They were not pretty children, but there was something very forlorn and wistful about them—something that claimed attention.

Angela held out her hand and called them to her. They moved forward like little automatons.

Their clothing was of a very varied order, composed of garments intended for older people and cut down to their tiny proportions, but it was clean, and she noticed that they had a wisp of black tied round their left arms.

Opening her bag, Angela found some pennies and gave them each one, and the child in the distance quickened her steps as she saw this little transaction.

When she came up she addressed the two mites very severely.

" Wot d'ye mean not answering when I called ? " she inquired. " Didn't you 'ear me ? Suppose I've got nothing to do but going about yellin' for you ! Now, come along on ! "

She took a hand of each and jerked them roughly towards her.

Angela interfered.

" Don't be cross with them," she said. " They were doing no harm. Do they belong to you ? Are you their sister ? "

" No fear ! " said the girl. " They ain't got no sister,

nor a brother neither. They won't have no mother much longer. She's dying, she is. Their father were killed a month ago."

"Oh, poor little things!" said Angela. "Why, they are only babies!"

"Twins," said the little girl laconically, "though she's bigger nor 'im. Why don't you speak to the lidy?" she inquired, stooping down and giving a shake to emphasize her words.

The little boy's face puckered up and he began to cry.

Angela got up and knelt on the grass beside him.

"Don't cry, little boy!" she said. "Tell me where you live and I'll take you home."

"Merton Terrace, 'Arrow Road's where they live," the guardian said glibly. "It ain't very fur!"

"Harrow Road? But that sounds a long way off," said Angela—"much too far for these small people. Well, come along! We'll have a cab, and I'll carry this little man. What is your name?" she inquired of her small bundle.

He was speechless, but his nurse was very loquacious.

She told his name and his age and various other matters concerning his family.

They were not far from the Bayswater Road, but even in that short distance the child whom Angela carried evinced signs of sleep.

"He don't never keep awake long, 'e don't. Say, 'Arold, why don't yer sit up? Yer'll mess the lidy's veil and 'at!"

"Never mind my hat and veil!" said Angela. "Let's get a cab."

As they turned out of the Park into the high road they almost collided with an officer, who touched his cap with an apology and was moving on when he stopped them.

"Why, Angela!" he said, and then he laughed. "What is happening?"

"Oh, I am so glad to see you, Rex!" Angela exclaimed. "I'm going to take these children home in a cab. Poor little mites! Their father's dead and their mother is ill, and they live somewhere in the Harrow Road. But I want to see you—I want to talk to you. Are you very busy?"

He told her at once that he was at her disposal for a little while.

"Suppose we both drive them home," he said, "and afterwards we can have a little chat, or, what is better still, we'll send them home in a cab and you and I can have a stroll in the Park and talk at the same time."

This arrangement appealed to the little girl in charge of the babies, and when a cab was hailed the driver was both interested and sympathetic.

"I'll see them all right, madam!" he said. "You can trust me. The wonder is," he added, glancing at Captain Rayburn and Angela, "that these little creatures can manage to get so far. The Park's a boon in summer-time, and that's sure enough. I dare say they've been 'ere since the first thing this morning, ain't yer?"

When the cab had driven away Angela turned back into the Park with Captain Rayburn and gave him her news.

"I thought something was wrong," he remarked; "let's sit down and talk it out."

To open her anxious heart to one so sympathetic was consoling.

Captain Rayburn took the same practical view of the matter as Maud had done, only he had his own way of dealing with it. He certainly managed to inspire comfort and hope, and then when he saw the tension had been lifted from her nerves he began to speak about himself. He went straight to the point.

"Angela, do you suppose there is any hope for me?"

She answered him in the same straightforward manner.

"I don't know, Rex. Sometimes I feel that you must be so much to her, and at others it seems to me you have no place in her life at all; and I understand it all so well now," Angela said; "much that used to seem strange to me and perhaps exaggerated is all so clear." She paused, and then said, "You wouldn't want Honor to be different to you?"

He smiled faintly and shook his head.

"All I want is to take care of her; she is so wonderful. But, after all, she is only human, and she needs so much

care. I should never expect her to care for me as she loved Chris, but she might grow fond of me in time."

"How much longer are you going to be over here?"

He told her that he did not know, adding—

"My job is a fairly important one, and, as I have made it rather a special study, I suppose I am useful. If it were not for Honor," he added, "I would pull at the strings I know to get back to France."

"What do you feel about things in general, Rex?" Angela asked after a little pause.

He was sitting forward, digging his stick into the ground, and he paused before answering—

"I am an optimist, as I think you know, but I don't expect miracles. We are in for a long business, my dear, and many strange things will happen before life becomes normal again, if ever it will be normal again in the old sense. The price of peace—the kind of peace that we must have and which all the world desires—will be tremendous. It will not come along just yet awhile."

"I try not to be selfish and look at things from a limited point of view," said Angela, "but, after all, it isn't easy. War to me means separation from Derry and a never-ceasing anxiety, loneliness, and apprehension. It is just like a heavy cloud shutting out the sun."

He put out his hand and grasped hers for an instant.

"Poor little Angela!" he said. "Don't I understand all you feel? And yours is only the voice of thousands. But buck up, dear little child! I am quite sure there is going to be great happiness for you."

They rose as he spoke, for it was getting late.

"I'm sorry I can't take you home," Captain Rayburn said, "but I have to hurry to keep an appointment with my chief, but I'll put you into a cab."

Angela refused this, however.

"I don't want a cab," she said. "I much prefer to walk, and then perhaps I shall get very tired. I want to tire myself out. I haven't been sleeping well the last few nights. I felt there was something wrong with Derry."

"Well, if you will walk," Captain Rayburn said, "go

home through the streets ; the Park is a little lonely for you. And look here, my dear—you mustn't mind if I speak very plainly—don't get selfish ! Don't think that *your* joys and sorrows are the most important things on earth. It is very natural—don't I know that ?—to put oneself first, but we are all of us going through strong cleansing fires just now, Angela dear. We are being searched and tested. Sometimes what seem the smallest things are the biggest ! " He was holding her hand and pressing it warmly. " By that I mean," he added, " the things that don't appear on the surface. Try and keep a smile on your face and a little sunshine in your heart, however depressed and uneasy you feel. You'll help some one else if you're cheerful, and that must be your reward."

" You are such a nice man, Rex ! " Angela said. There were tears in her voice and in her eyes. " And now I'll tell you a secret. I should be, oh, so glad if Honor would marry you, because then I should cease to worry about her ! I should know that all was well with her."

They parted, both of them, with full hearts, but his words had done Angela a great good, and she walked back to her flat almost cheerfully.

CHAPTER XXV

IT was not long before Angela began to receive news direct again from her husband. They were merely pencilled scraps at first, but as he got better he sent her longer and more satisfying letters.

Evidently, though he had been, as he put it, "knocked out" rather sharply, he had made a quick recovery, and, though his handwriting was a trifle shaky, every word he wrote was treasured by Angela.

He expressed himself very freely about Major Fothering-ton.

"Of course," he wrote in one letter, "it was not your fault that Hugo arrived and made himself at home. You only did what everybody else would have done in your own house. All the same, I loathe the idea of his sitting in my arm-chair and listening to your darling voice, and I want you to be on your guard against him. Hugo is a very subtle sort of fellow—not clever, but what the Boers call 'slim.' He simply *can't* go straight. He doesn't love me, that's sure, and I'm awfully sorry you have come in contact with him, but I have the most supreme faith in your own natural instinct. Hugo won't bother you much. Now, you are not to fret, and you are not to do too much hospital work or other kind of war-work. You are just to keep yourself happy and sunny and lovely, and perhaps you will see me walking in on you one of these days when you least expect it."

At the end of this letter Wynstaye had scribbled—

"Of course, since your sister Maud has made such friends with Mrs. Bosworth, I suppose it will be a little difficult for you to avoid meeting her, but I'm not keen on you seeing her very often."

It was a great relief to Angela's mind to realize that her husband was not angry with her, and, since his view of his kinsman coincided with her feeling for Major Fotherington, she resolved to dismiss the other man from her thoughts altogether.

It was quickly made evident to her, however, that Hugo Fotherington did not intend to be dismissed.

She had given her maid Mason instructions to inform Major Fotherington that she was not in the house when he called; nevertheless, he managed to make his way in on one or two occasions, and Angela realized that he must have bribed her servant. As it happened, the first time she returned to find him sitting in her drawing-room waiting for her she was accompanied by a fellow V.A.D., and this girl, a certain Miss Vera Radford, stayed chatting till Major Fotherington rose and took his leave.

On the second occasion, unfortunately, Angela was alone, and she took the opportunity of informing the man that she regarded his visit as an affront.

"I am not receiving any one just now while Derry is away," she said. "I have so much work to do at the hospital, and when I come back I am too tired to be in a condition to receive guests."

"Why don't you be quite open with me?" Fotherington had replied. "Why not say outright that you don't want to have anything to do with me?"

Angela looked at him.

She was in the V.A.D. uniform, and wore a blue veil with a little white band encircling her delicate pretty face. It was a costume which suited her extraordinarily well. It gave her a touch of height and at the same time it made her seem very young.

There were blue shadows round her eyes, but weariness and delicacy only added to her beauty.

"I have tried," she answered him coldly, "to avoid speaking so plainly, but, as you seem to have guessed at my feelings, I hope that you will in future respect them."

He turned away and stared out of the window for a moment, and then he turned back.

"What has Derrick been saying about me? What lies has he been telling you?"

She answered him coldly. "Please understand I am not influenced by any one, even by my husband. Your visits are unwelcome to me; that should be enough for you."

He looked at her and then he laughed again.

"What a sweet little prig you are!" he said. "And how badly you play your part!" then he changed his tone. "Of course you have been primed with all sorts of stories about me," he said half roughly, "and I think it's very hard lines on me that you should turn against me in this way."

Angela made him no answer, and there was silence between them. He ceased to look at her and moved to the door. Then he turned and said in a smothered kind of voice—

"Derrick had no right to marry you. You evidently regard me as an out-and-out bad lot, but I'd stop short of doing what he has done!"

Angela looked at him just for an instant and then set her lips firmly.

"You are making a great mistake. Please go."

But the man lost his temper.

"You won't be able to shut your ears to every one," he said, "nor will your eyes always be blinded. You'll wake up and understand things in a little while, and, unless I am very much mistaken, you are not the sort of girl to sit down quietly and allow yourself to be fooled with impunity. You imagine Derrick adores you? I dare say he does up to a certain point. You are very attractive, my dear, but don't flatter yourself that you come first with him. When Patricia Bosworth threw him over, as everybody knew she would do sooner or later, he wanted to pay her back, and that's why he married you!"

Angela was standing looking at him proudly. Though her heart was beating like a wild thing in her breast, yet she managed to speak calmly, even gently.

"It is very good of you to tell me all this, Major Fotherington," she said, "but, as a matter of fact, it is not news

to me, nor can it make the slightest difference. But I am sure that you will see now how right I was to ask you not to come here ; not to approach me in any way."

He stood looking at her undecidedly for an instant or two, then turned on his heel and went away.

Angela stood where he had left her, but the smile faded from her lips and she closed her eyes, swaying to and fro a little. That which she had imagined in the very beginning of things had passed completelyout of her mind and thoughts of late, but now he had brought it back again. Callously and sneeringly he had spoken as one who had all facts sharp and clear before him, and, despite her courage and her yearning intention not to doubt, not to falter, this hurt.

Something more than a feeling of bodily weariness took possession of her as she sank at last into a chair. She felt over-burdened, and the ugly words of the man who had just left her lingered.

Mason brought in some tea while she still sat there, and Angela roused herself.

Just as the maid was leaving the room, having settled the tea-things on the table, she called her back.

" Mason, I don't want to know how much money Major Fotherington gave you, I only want you to know that if you admit him again, either when I'm out or when I'm in, you will have to leave me at once. I am sorry to have tc say this to you, but, you see, I gave you very strict orders and you disobeyed me."

The girl, who was not very old, grew crimson and tears came into her eyes.

" I am very sorry, ma'am—indeed I'm very sorry ! I did tell the Major that you didn't want him to come in, but he wouldn't be said ' No.' "

Angela wrote her customary letter to her husband a little later, and she did not even mention Hugo Fotherington.

She tried to make her letter as happy and as full of little news as usual ; but it was written with a great effort, and when it was dispatched to the post she felt that kind of nervous emotion which follows on some shock or some mental strain.

As luck would have it, Vera Radford, with whom she worked at the hospital, ran in now to ask Angela to accept very short notice and go back to supper with her.

She was a few years older than Angela, a girl who had graduated from the country to the stage, but who, when war broke out, had given her services to voluntary work and was now taking up nursing seriously.

"You have never seen my little flat. It will amuse you. It is just like a doll's-house. There is about room for two people to move in it with comfort."

Angela rose with alacrity.

"I'm so glad you came!" she said. "I was feeling awfully depressed."

"Had an idea you might be," her friend answered, "and I didn't think you were looking too well to-day. You know, dear little Mrs. Derry, you mustn't do too much. I'm a hardy sort of individual and can stand any amount of fatigue, but you are different. I vote we have a taxi. My diggings are a little distance from here."

The drive did Angela good. The cheery chatter of her friend was a good antidote to unhappy thoughts. Angela had liked her from the first.

In a sense Miss Radford reminded her of Theo Masson, she was so capable, so quick, such a good worker, and so full of energy that she filled a void in Angela's life.

Miss Radford's little flat was in a block of buildings evidently intended for artisans. It stood in a little cul-de-sac, fortunately away from a rather noisy neighbourhood. There was a tiny drawing-room and a still more tiny dining-room, a real doll's-house of a kitchen, and a nice airy room for a bedroom.

Angela fell in love with it. "I think it is too adorable!" she declared. "And you cook for yourself? You are here all alone? How nice! I didn't know you were so clever."

The other girl laughed.

"Am I clever? I don't know! You see, I was brought up to do all sorts of things for myself, and very thankful I am now that I was. When I was on tour I could not

really eat the stuff that I was given in lodgings, as I generally did a little cooking for myself, and I was resolved to establish myself in a little place of my own when the opportunity came."

She was flitting to and fro preparing the table for their meal as she spoke.

"I often wonder what my mother would think of my London abode. I'm afraid she would find it stuffy and dusty. Please make yourself at home, Mrs. Derry."

Angela went all round the room looking at the ornaments and the pictures. There were very many photographs, and she picked up one and examined it with some curiosity. It was the photograph of a very handsome girl, with short hair; she was dressed as a boy. It was the writing on this portrait that claimed Angela's attention: a few words inscribed in a decidedly scrawly hand.

"Yours to a frazzle.—WINNIE WYNSTAYE."

Angela gave a little exclamation.

"Winnie Wynstaye! Why, how funny! This girl has the same name as myself!"

Her hostess was bustling about getting supper ready, but she came out of the kitchen as Angela called her.

"Oh, you are looking at my picture gallery!" she said. "Who is that? Let me see—what portrait have you got? Oh, that girl!" Miss Radford shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know why on earth I keep that out. I scarcely know her. She was in a revue on tour, and, as we happened to be in the same town on one occasion, the company fraternized."

"She is very handsome," Angela said, and her hostess assented.

"Oh, yes, she is very good-looking! I have never seen her on the stage, but I hear she is decidedly clever, though rather common. Wynstaye!" she repeated. "I never noticed that; but you know this type of girl when she goes on the stage always picks out a good name if she can. I expect, if we only knew the truth, her real name is Smith or Jones, or, judging by her look, probably a Jewish name."

She took the photograph from Angela's hand, opened a drawer, and threw it inside, and then she drew attention to the pictures of her mother and family and her home in the country.

"We are all scattered now," she said. "One of my brothers is in Mesopotamia, another is in the Naval Reserve, and the youngest of all is just going into the Flying Corps. I just wonder what will happen to all of us when this frightful business ends? I don't suppose we shall any of us shake down into our old corners."

When they were sitting at supper Miss Radford talked to Angela about her stage experiences.

"Of course I was supposed to do an awful thing when I took my independence into my own hands; now it is the most natural thing in the world for girls to live by themselves. My darling mother has always been a little old-fashioned, and I'm afraid that I made her very unhappy when I chose to be an actress."

"Did you like the life?" asked Angela.

"I loved it! I was getting on fairly well too, but when the war came everything was changed. Apart from the dreary hopelessness of waiting for an engagement, I felt I must do something for my country, so I turned my back on the stage for a little while."

It was soon evident to Miss Radford that her guest was depressed and unhappy. She had conceived a great liking for Angela, and she felt sorry for this young wife.

She knew a good many wives almost as young as Angela, but the majority of those she had met were of a different calibre. No doubt they were fond of their husbands, but they still managed to grasp a little enjoyment out of life. They would dine out or go to theatres, and were not perhaps above having a mild flirtation; but Angela Wynstaye, though she worked so pluckily, always had a look of wistful expectation in her eyes. She was seemingly one of those who never forgot even for a moment.

When she rose to go Miss Radford insisted upon accompanying her home.

"Oh, please don't think this is a bother to me!" she

declared. "I am never so happy as when I am looking after somebody."

They travelled this time on the top of a bus, and by the time Angela had arrived home and was ready for bed she was so tired that she slept right through the night.

In the days that followed, although she had made a firm resolve to herself not to remember anything of what Major Fotherington had said to her or allow herself to sit down and brood over things that were over and done with, there were many moments when, with a little sharp pang, she would recall that letter in her jewel-case, and there would flash back to her memory the cold inimical eyes of Patricia Bosworth, and the certainty that this woman regarded her in no pleasant fashion.

But not once did she let her husband glean the slightest suggestion that such a heavy cloud had fallen on her happy spirit.

Nor did she confide in her sister Honor, and, though she stayed several week-ends with her mother in the country, she kept this secret locked away, even from that mother's tender love and sympathy, securely in her heart.

Once she travelled down to the farm and spent the night with Mrs. Carter.

Her husband's old friend was really distressed at not being able to return and share the little flat with her, but the injuries which her stepdaughter had sustained had proved much more serious than had at first been imagined, and consequently Alice Carter was unable to leave the farm.

To this kind, sympathetic woman Angela opened her heart just a little—that is to say, she spoke of Hugo Fotherington's persistence in forcing himself upon her, and she even touched on their last unpleasant interview.

Mrs. Carter had nothing but contempt for Fotherington.

"Perhaps it is just as well, my dear child," she said, "that you have come up against Hugo in this way, and that you have sent him about his business on your own initiative. I don't think that you will have any more to fear from him now; but take my advice—tell Derry when you see him exactly what has happened. I

believe in being straightforward and open in matters of this sort."

"Oh, I mean to tell him!" said Angela; but there had been a troubled look in her eyes and a little touch of confusion in her manner which had not escaped Mrs. Carter, who, shrewdly enough, guessed that Angela had not told her everything.

As a matter of fact the girl could not bring herself to speak, even to one whom she knew was so truly devoted to her husband, on the subject of Derrick's former infatuation for Patricia Bosworth.

She told herself repeatedly that it was all over and done with; but somehow she felt that if she began to speak about this openly she might wound herself so deeply that even the most optimistic outlook and brave common-sense attitude might refuse to let that wound heal.

After she had gone Mrs. Carter took counsel with herself, and then she wrote to Derrick Wynstaye.

She told him she had seen Angela and was not happy about her, that things were happening about which she felt she had no right to speak as his wife intended to deal with them herself, but she gave him clearly to understand that Fotherington had tried to work mischief.

"You told me just before you went away last time," she wrote, "that you were afraid that some one might attempt to work harm in your married life. I do not think in this case the attempt has been a success, but I want you to be on your guard, and I want you to write as often as you can to Angela and to give her all the comfort and the happiness of knowing that she stands first in your thoughts and in your life. You know, Derry my dear, she is very young and very lonely. And, despite the fact that she is built of splendid stuff, she won't be any the worse for having constant repetition from you that she is very deeply loved and very necessary to your happiness."

Derrick Wynstaye answered this letter by a very short one.

"Thanks, dear old friend," he scribbled. "I am grateful to you. I am going to let no one come between Angela and me, you may be sure of that."

He did not speak of leave or homecoming, but just twenty-four hours after he had posted that letter he landed in England unexpectedly.

He had been able to obtain leave for a couple of days and at the same time to combine a rather important mission.

He was looking thin but bronzed, and showed very little outward sign of having had a very unpleasant crash not so long ago.

As the taxi carried him swiftly through the street to his home he could hardly sit in the cab.

He wondered to himself whether he should find Angela in the flat. Perhaps she would be spending the evening with her sister, or might even be out with somebody else, but, anyhow, she would return early, and then he would hold her in his arms and kiss away all her doubts, her little difficulties, her loneliness, and any suggestion of unhappiness.

When he stood outside the door of the flat his heart was beating very violently, so that he had to pause for a minute or two. Then he rang the bell, and after a little while some one came to answer.

It was Angela, and she spoke before opening the door.

"Is that you, Mason?"

The sound of the voice travelled through the letter-box and he answered her—

"No, it isn't Mason."

The next instant the door was opened and she had flung herself into his arms.

He thought at first she had fainted, she hung so heavily in his hold, but as he closed the door and carried her practically into the drawing-room he saw that she was only temporarily overcome.

"Why, my sweetheart," he said, "cheer up! I'm so sorry if I have frightened you. I really hadn't time to let you know, or rather I might have sent you a telegram, but

I thought I wouldn't in case I should be held up at the last moment."

Angela could only cling to him and press her face against his shoulder, but little by little the trembling grew less and she became calmer.

"To see you," she said brokenly—"you, your own real self! Oh, I can't believe it! I—I have said to myself so often. 'Perhaps Derry will come to-night. Shall I know when he is coming? Surely I shall recognize his footsteps outside? Something will tell me that he is either coming up in the lift or running up the stairs.' And then you came and I had no idea! I—I asked if it was Mason because I don't like to open the door to any stranger."

Derrick Wynstaye pressed her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

"Quite right," he said—"quite right, dearest! But I'm sorry that you let the girl go out. I don't like you to be here alone. And now let me look at you!"

He held her off at arm's length, and there came a little touch of gravity into his eyes. It seemed to him that she had grown very thin, that there was an ethereal look about her—a new look, something which put her apart from him in a sense and yet drew him, if possible, closer and closer towards her.

He had left a girl with something of a child in her, but he returned to find the girl changed into a woman.

He had not realized till this moment how much he loved her or how grateful he was for her love.

CHAPTER XXVI

LIFE was passing very slowly and heavily with Patricia Bosworth.

She had secured her position ; she was the possessor in her own right now of a great deal of money ; her husband had lavished jewels and gifts upon her. Not even in the old days when her father's wealth had been apparently undisputed had Patricia possessed so much. She knew herself to be envied by nearly all her friends ; some there were who desired not merely her money or her jewels, but who wistfully envied her the love of such a man as Richard Bosworth.

Even Maud Fayne—who in the first instant had regarded Captain Bosworth with a certain amount of contempt, and who had sneered at his very open devotion to his wife—gradually grew to realize the beauty of his nature and character, and to feel also that touch of envy for the woman who possessed this man's heart so completely and who valued it so little.

If Patricia had one grievance, it was that her husband continued to be an invalid. Despite his gallant effort to keep up and to do all that was demanded of him, it was patent to the meanest intelligence that he was a very sick man.

As the days went by he seemed to grow a little worse.

June happened to be a wet and chilly month, and this reacted unfavourably upon him.

When his sister came to town about the end of the month she was shocked at his appearance, and, breaking through the rule that she had set herself at the time of their marriage, she sought an interview with Mrs. Bosworth.

Patricia received her in her wonderful house and made a show of being pleased to meet her, but the interview was not an agreeable one.

"I have come to talk to you about Dick," Mrs. Chatfield said. "He seems to me to be shockingly ill."

Patricia gave a little shrug of her shoulders.

"He had a medical board only three weeks ago. I understood that they found him improving," she said.

"I don't care what the medical board found!" retorted Mrs. Chatfield. "I go by what I see. Dick needs the greatest care. He ought to go out of London."

"You must blame the war, not me," was Patricia's answer. "Travelling is not so easy nowadays. I suppose we could go to Italy or to the south of France, but if you only suggest such a thing to Dick he simply flies at one."

"Does he?" said his sister. "Then he is very much changed. I only wish Dick knew how to fly at anybody!"

Mrs. Bosworth looked at her for an instant in silence, then she took out a cigarette-case and lit a cigarette.

"Are you by any chance finding fault with me? Am I to blame because you imagine Dick very ill?" she inquired, and Mrs. Chatfield, throwing prudence to the winds, answered promptly—

"Yes, I am! You married my brother for some purpose of your own and not a very high-minded purpose, and, having married him, it was your duty to take care of him."

Patricia's face flushed.

"I certainly did not marry to be a nurse to a perpetual invalid," she said. "If Dick's health is in such a precarious condition this can be no new thing, and it would have been more honest to have told me before he made me his wife. And, after all, I don't see that it is any business of yours to come and interfere."

It cost Magna Chatfield a great deal to curb her anger and her unhappiness.

"You may be right in a sense, Patricia, and I have not the least desire to interfere," she answered, "but you must make allowances for me. I love Dick—he and my husband are all I have. I worry about him. He used to be splendidly healthy, and I think you know that, but he came back a totally different man from France, and I knew at once that he needed the greatest care and the most constant

attention to restore him to anything like his former condition."

"You talk as if I ill-used him. After all, he is not a boy," said Patricia, with a hard laugh. "I assure you I have very little to do in arranging Dick's life. He is looked after by his servant. He has his doctors. He is very obstinate."

Mrs. Chatfield was silent for a moment, and then she looked straight into the eyes of the other woman.

"My dear, you know as well as I do that Dick's health and happiness lie absolutely in your hands. There is so much that you could do. Just a word dropped, a suggestion, just a tiny little sacrifice on your part, and I am convinced that in a very short time you would see a great difference."

"Well, I'll tell Dick what you have been saying," said Mrs. Bosworth, and she rose as she spoke, intimating that the interview had better be closed.

Mrs. Chatfield caught her breath sharply.

She had gone to see Patricia in a sense confidentially, and she realized that in that last speech of her brother's wife there lay a threat. Richard Bosworth was completely under the thrall of his wife's influence! Patricia would naturally in future use her power mercilessly, so she—Magna—would be separated from him just a little more effectually than she had been.

She took her leave, going away with a heavy heart, and she left Patricia furiously angry.

It was sufficient that she should be married to a man whose health was shattered, for, though she had pretended that there was no cause for anxiety, she knew better even than Mrs. Chatfield how ill her husband was, but to be called to account, to be frankly accused of failing in her duty, was a humiliation which she had not expected and did not bear very easily.

To escape her thoughts she went out into the sunshine and made her way to the Park.

Sitting under the trees, she exchanged greetings languidly with such of her friends as she found there. There were only a few people she knew.

Days of idleness, of gossip, the flaunting of new gowns,

were largely at an end. The women of fashion, of rank, of wealth, were differently occupied.

Patricia herself felt at times a little uneasy, for she was regarded with some surprise by her numerous friends inasmuch as she was content to give money and do nothing else.

But she was not built on an heroic scale. She had quickly relinquished the war work she had taken up for a time. To serve at a hot, stuffy canteen, to take her place among the munition workers, to turn herself into a V.A.D. nurse or pantry-help, did not appeal to her, neither did she relish the idea of making over her beautiful new house, as so many of her acquaintances had done, as a hospital or a place of rest for wounded strangers.

The restless activity of the majority of the war-workers irritated and annoyed her. The dragging on of the war, with its inevitable changes, did more than irritate her.

It was very pleasant out in the Park. At last the bad weather had gone and summer seemed to have come to stay. Mrs. Bosworth talked in a desultory, half-hearted manner as she sat looking with idle, dissatisfied eyes at the people who passed to and fro in the distance, and then all at once she was roused—sharply roused—as she suddenly caught sight of a tall, splendid figure in khaki walking swiftly along.

Her heart stood still for an instant and then began to beat furiously.

Just for an instant she stared incredulously at the man approaching, and then she realized that her first glance had been correct and she had not made a mistake.

Though she had not heard of his arrival in town, it was indubitably Derrick Wynstaye who was coming towards her.

Without thought of personal dignity, only strung up by the sudden passionate delight which sight of him brought, Patricia Bosworth rose, walked swiftly across the grass, and when Wynstaye reached a certain point she stood immediately in front of him.

"You are not going to pass me without a word, I hope," she said, and she smiled as she spoke.

She was looking, as she knew, very beautiful in white from head to foot. A row of splendid pearls gleamed round her throat, and her wonderful eyes, under the wide brim of her hat, shone like stars.

Deep in thought, Derrick pulled up sharply, started at first, and then, as he realized who it was addressing him, his face darkened.

He did not offer to take her outstretched hand; he merely saluted her.

"How do you do?" he said. "I needn't ask that because you are looking, as usual, in first-rate condition."

Patricia bit her lip.

"Thanks!" she said. "That sounds as if I were a prize animal of some sort! I had no idea that you were in town, Derry, or that you were expected. Have you long leave?"

"Not very long," he answered her. "I just rushed home to have a glimpse of my wife and carry through certain commands."

"Are you in a great hurry now? Can't you sit here with me a little while?"

"So sorry," said Wynstaye easily, "Angela is expecting me to lunch. I'm rather late as it is."

She bit her lip a second time, and the wild beating of her heart was changing to a dull resentful thud.

"I am sure Mrs. Wynstaye would not grudge me a few minutes."

"I am perfectly sure she wouldn't," the young man answered her frankly; "but I cannot afford the time. So glad to have seen you looking so well. Good-bye!"

He put his hand to his cap again and was moving on when she stopped him.

"Why are you so beastly to me, Derry?"

He frowned, and yet he laughed at the same time.

"I wasn't aware that I was behaving in any way objectionably."

"Oh, don't juggle with words!" she answered passionately. "After all"—there was a note of defiance in her

voice now—" I consider I have some right to claim your attention for a little while at least."

At this he laughed outright and began to move on, suggesting by this that they were attracting attention.

Patricia walked beside him, though it was immaterial to her whether they were remarked or not.

" You certainly have a very queer way of looking at things," he remarked. " I gave you credit for being a more reasonable individual."

Patricia could not find her voice immediately ; when she spoke it was trembling.

" Of course I know quite well that you want me to believe that—that you have put me out of your thoughts altogether, that you've forgotten everything ; but I am not going to believe that, Derry."

He did not answer her at once, then he said quietly, almost gravely :

" No ; one doesn't forget, one only learns truths by recalling things that have gone and contrasting them with things as they really are." Then he said, " I hope your husband is well ? Is he still over here ? "

Patricia bit her lip and took no notice of these questions. " We can't talk here . . . and I must talk to you. Come and see me this afternoon ? "

" I'm sorry, but I haven't a free moment. I'm off again almost immediately."

" It's only common courtesy to do what I ask ! " the woman exclaimed passionately.

" Well, then, I must be discourteous."

Patricia stood still and faced him.

" At least you might tell me you don't hate me, Derry ! "

He answered her at once.

" I can certainly tell you that."

" Then why not let me feel you are my friend ?

" He smiled, though his eyes were still grave.

" You know you don't really want my friendship : in fact, you don't know exactly what you do want with me, but your vanity demands that you should whistle and I should come to heel. I think that sums up the position.

I told you just now," he went on, " that one doesn't forget, but one can deplore old follies and mistakes ; and if I have one regret for all that is past and over, it is that for so long a time I deluded myself into believing that the infatuation which I had for you was the best I had to offer to any woman. I know differently now," he finished coldly. Then he smiled. " Sorry if I offend you with my plain words, but it's best to deal with things straightforwardly you know. Good-bye."

He finished his words by coming to attention and saluting her ; the next instant he had turned on his heel and he had walked away.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE second parting from her husband was infinitely worse for Angela than the first.

A new and a deeper feeling seemed to have been born between them in this brief spell of coming together again.

Just as he had seen a change in her, so she realized the change in him. This was hard to define exactly, but it was found perhaps in a little note of seriousness, a touch of new and almost reverential devotion for herself which made their love more beautiful, more precious. And yet Wynstaye was not in any way depressed. He maintained a happy, high-spirited kind of manner which in truth he adopted entirely for Angela's benefit ; and he spoke openly about many things which she had almost decided she would not touch upon.

For instance he went straight to the point about Patricia Bosworth.

After they had lunched together Wynstaye drove Angela out to Richmond Park.

The glory of the morning lingered.

In town it was very hot ; but under the trees there was shade and freshness, and they could with a little imagination suppose themselves far away from the City, with its crowds of people and from all those outward and visible signs which marked the progress of war.

And sitting under the trees, Derrick Wynstaye laid his heart bare to his wife.

" If we had been married in normal times," he said, " I don't suppose I should ever have spoken to you as I am going to speak now. But life is so absolutely different these days ; change comes like a flash of lightning, and we find ourselves face to face on the instant with difficulties and problems which formerly would have come to us, if they came at all, gradually and almost naturally. Again, if we

were going to be together all the time," he went on, " there would have been no need for me to warn you or prepare you, but "—he shrugged his shoulders even while he smiled—" I can't afford to take risks." He was holding one of her hands in his as he spoke, passing his lips across it every now and then. He had made her take off her hat ; he loved to see the sunlight flicker through the trees and rest on the glory of her hair. Suddenly he said, " You are so pale ; I don't want you to be so pale, Angela. And you have a look in your eyes that hurts me."

She coloured wistfully, and she smiled.

" I didn't know that, Derry," she said. " I'm so sorry, and I'll try not to be pale, but, you see, you gave me such a tremendous shock when you came yesterday ! It was lovely, but it was a very big shock, and I haven't quite recovered from it yet."

He closed his eyes for an instant, and the grip on her hand was almost fierce. Just for a little while he did not speak, and then he said—

" I can understand now the feeling of a man into whose hands some great treasure has come unexpectedly. There must be such joy and such fear combined. You are my great treasure, dear little wife ; and, oh, if only I could let you know what amazing, what astounding happiness you have brought me it would ease my heart ! But there are some things too big to be discussed, and this is one of them. Well, now, to get on with my duty."

Angela put her other hand on his arm.

" Listen ! " she said. " I don't want you to tell me anything. I don't want you to think that I need to be satisfied or that there is anything I want to know. I have all I want ; and when you speak as you have just spoken," Angela added in a low voice, " I have almost too much."

" It isn't that I want to satisfy you, my dearest," the man answered her ; " it is because I know the world. I know how mean, how pitifully mean some people are, and I want, if possible, to build up a big ring of defence around you."

" You have done that," Angela answered him. In the

same breath she asked him, "What are you afraid of?" And he answered her frankly—

"Many things." He pressed his lips to her hand once again and then he gave a sigh. "You are seeing the nicest side of me, and I know that there is as much good in me as in any average man; but I haven't always been wise, Angela. When I look back I can't tell you how many things I have done which I now deplore. I'm ready to pay the penalty for whatever sins I have committed, but I don't want that penalty to fall on you." Then he changed his tone. "Look here, Angela, I am going to be quite frank with you! I don't want you to meet Mrs. Bosworth if you can avoid doing so. I don't trust her. I met her this morning in the Park, and I read her as easily as I can read a book. Though she has married such a good chap, and he has given her all one would imagine a woman of her type needs to make her happy, she is not satisfied. She is restless and discontented; a vain woman and a foolish one. But foolish women can be dangerous, and in this case when she . . ."

"Don't be afraid to go on," said Angela. And she looked at him bravely, and smiled as she spoke. "I know now, Derry dear, that once upon a time you were madly in love with her and that she treated you badly, and so—and so," Angela added, with a little catch, "I can guess quite easily what is in her mind now. Perhaps I shall surprise you if I tell you that I knew a long time ago what Patricia was to you. When we go home I will give you part of a letter which came into my hands quite by chance—a letter written by you to her long before we met; and, although I did not know the man who had written that letter, I was awfully sorry for him. I felt as if I were watching some poor bird beating its wings against a cage and beating them in vain."

He caught his breath and closed his eyes for an instant.

"It must have been that unspoken sympathy, that sense of sweetest pity in your heart, that drew me to you so surely. I *was* in a cage; a cage made by my

own hands." He paused, frowning for an instant and Angela waited for him to go on. Her heart was thrilling a little nervously, but she did not stop him speaking now; she felt it did him good. "To be just to myself," Derrick said slowly, "there is one explanation for my infatuation—it was because I had put everything in my heart for Patricia which had no outlet elsewhere. She ceased to be one individual; she became to me the combination of those influences which we men cherish in our hearts and which mean so much to us. When I lost my father and my home, and when I fully realized the type of woman my mother is, there came upon me an almost overwhelming need for some big purpose on which to concentrate, something for which to work, to live for; and I thought I had found this in Patricia. It was stupid of me, wasn't it?" Angela slipped her hand closer into his but said nothing, and he went on slowly: "And yet it was comprehensible. For in those days, God knows why! she chose to be kind to me. She let me imagine impossible things, and little by little she became a veritable necessity to me. It was not love—I know that now; it was an obsession, and not until she had given me the truth herself would I let myself believe that I had been worshipping at an empty shrine."

Angela put her hand on his lips.

"I don't want to hear any more," she said. "All that you tell me is so easy for me to understand, but that belongs to you. It was your life before I met you. What concerns me is quite another matter."

There was no one in sight, and Wynstaye drew her to him and kissed her trembling lips.

"Don't speak," he whispered, "only remember how much I love you!"

But Angela, though she returned his kisses, shook her head.

"No, darling, I must speak!" she said. "I must know just one thing." She caught her breath. "I want to know —I—I——" she hesitated and then said, "When Major Fotherington saw me last time he said many bitter things;

but the most cruel of all was the suggestion that you married me because——"

Her husband interrupted and stopped her.

"I am not going to let you say it; and I entreat you never to let it come into your thoughts. This is what Patricia Bosworth would enjoy. It may take her a long time to be convinced, but, after all, she doesn't count. No one counts but you and me; and here at your feet, Angela, before God, I tell you humbly and with all sincerity that I asked you to be my wife because there came to me suddenly the realization that without you my life would be horribly, utterly empty. That nothing mattered but you. Oh! my dearest, tell me that you will never let your faith in me be broken!"

She answered him as he wished to be answered, and they kissed again, feeling as if a vow were sanctified in that kiss; then Angela got up, glancing at her watch.

"Oh, we must go!" she said. "I don't want to go, but you have that appointment at six, and you must not be late, darling. How beautiful it has been here! It seems fantastical, incredible, when one looks round in such a place as this, where all is so beautiful, to remember that the world is at war!"

"I wish you would leave London," Wynstaye said as they walked back to the car which was standing on the pathway.

"Leave my darling little home!" Angela exclaimed. "Oh, I couldn't do that, Derry!"

"Why not? You could always come back to it. You will probably be in for some very hot weather now, and I hate to think of you shut up in a hospital doing war-work when the sun is broiling and there will be no air."

But Angela would not listen to this.

"Believe me, I am happier where I am," she assured him. "I love our home. It gets dearer to me every day; and then I love to feel I am on the spot so that if you do come over again unexpectedly we can be together so quickly. And you will come again soon, won't you, Derry?"

"You mustn't tempt me," the man answered her in a low voice; and she said no more.

Honor Bellares dined with them that night.

She had made a little water-colour sketch of Angela and had put it into a little leather case so that he could carry it in his pocket. The sister had caught Angela's new expression most happily. It was a beautiful little portrait.

The evening was a happy one in a quiet fashion and they drove Mrs. Bellares home early. Derrick Wynstaye snatched just one moment alone with her before they parted.

"Promise me one thing, Honor," he said hoarsely. "Be with her as much as you can. I tell you it is simply torture to me to leave her, and yet I must go."

"You must go, of course," Mrs. Bellares answered him gently; "and I promise you I will look after her very carefully. I have arranged with her to excuse herself from her work to-morrow and to come to me directly after you have gone. I want some one to sit to me for hands, and it is always such a joy to paint Angela's hands! Good-bye, Derry dear! God be with you!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE heat which Derrick Wynstaye had prophesied might come arrived in due course, though it was some weeks after his return to France, for July was another broken month ; but in August the sun came out with almost tropical force as though intent in making up for lost time. The streets were like a furnace, the houses devoid of air, and very quickly the trees and the parks seemed parched and brown.

Angela had taken a fortnight out of London to stay with her mother ; but, despite Mrs. Fayne's advice and loving protest, she had gone back to her flat at the end of that time and took up her hospital work again.

" So many fail just now and about this time," she said to her mother ; " and it doesn't seem fair. I have had a little holiday, and I'll take another fortnight later on ; besides, I like the work. Oh, of course I do get tired," she agreed. " But then I go to bed so early, and Mason looks after me most carefully."

She was walking slowly away from the hospital one evening through the Park when a car passed her with her sister Maud in it.

Angela was not looking in that direction, so she did not recognize her sister, but Miss Fayne ordered the car to turn round and follow her.

When hailed, Angela stood still and looked about her ; then she saw who it was who was calling her, and she walked from the grass to the path.

" Hallo, Maud ! " she said. " I was just going to sit down here for a little while."

" Get in and sit beside me. Patricia has sent me home in her car," said Maud Fayne. " I think you are very foolish, Angela, to go on slaving at that hospital in this

heat. You look dead! There are crowds of girls who are better fitted for this work than you are. Why not leave it to them?"

"I must do something," Angela answered. "And I don't dislike the work."

Maud shivered.

"Shut up below stairs, washing up greasy plates and cups and saucers, with the temperature at almost tropical heat! Well, you have a funny taste, I must say!"

"I am doing the telephone this week," Angela remarked cheerfully, adding, "It's rather hot in the pantry; but, after all, what discomforts we suffer are nothing compared to what our men have to endure, are they?"

"I am going away," Maud announced suddenly, ignoring the last remark. "I am going down to Cornwall with Patricia. I suppose you have heard the last news about Captain Bosworth?"

Angela shook her head.

"No; I hope it isn't bad news."

Miss Fayne shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, it certainly isn't good. His lungs have been condemned. It's a dreadful business for her."

The colour rushed into Angela's face.

"For her!" she repeated. "Why for her? If this is true, she is not the person to be pitied. She won't have the whole of her life blighted. I am not a scrap sorry for her, but I am dreadfully sorry for him. Poor Captain Bosworth! He is such a dear, and, oh, what a blow this will be to his sister!"

Maud Fayne put on her stiffest expression.

"Oh, of course I am sorry for him too, only I don't think any man has any right to marry if he knows he has got seeds of disease in him!"

"I am afraid we shall not look at this from the same point of view, Maud," Angela answered gently, and she changed the subject.

"When are you thinking of leaving?"

"Oh, of course Patricia can't get away until her husband is able to be moved! That will be some time next week, I

expect. We are taking a house together, and we shall have relays of people down to stay with us."

"Oh, that will be very jolly!" said Angela, with gentle irony; then she said, "I hope you will make an effort to see daddy and mummy before you go, Maud."

"Have they been complaining?"

"Complaining? Good heavens, no!" Angela answered sharply. "They are not of the complaining kind—you know that. I merely make the suggestion."

"I'll drive you home," Miss Fayne said suddenly.

But Angela shook her head.

"No, thanks; I'm going to sit here a little while! I always sit in the Park when I can, and, as it is getting late and I'm sure you want to get home and dress, I'll hop out."

As she alighted from the car Miss Fayne leaned forward.

"Have you seen Rex Rayburn just lately?"

Angela shook her head.

"Not just lately, no; but I think he is still in town—in fact I am sure he is. But you should ask Honor. I know he is seeing her, because he asked her to do his portrait."

Maud Fayne's face changed colour suddenly.

"Strange idea!" she said, with a short laugh. "I always think a man paints a man much better than a woman can. Honor's work is so essentially feminine."

"Evidently Captain Rayburn is not of your opinion. Perhaps you haven't seen Honor's work just lately? She is doing some splendid portraits, and has any number of commissions. Her banking account must be going up by leaps and bounds. Well, I will say 'Ta-ta!' now; I dare say I shall see something of you before you leave town."

"I'll ring you up," said Miss Fayne; and so they separated.

After all, Angela did not sit in the Park.

The news about Richard Bosworth had upset her; she felt she must go home and write a few lines to Mrs. Chatfield.

She wondered, too, if it would be possible for her to see Patricia's husband. She grieved for him and about him. There was a very tender spot in her heart for Richard

Bosworth. What cruel fate had contrived to put the heart and life of such a man into the hands of such a woman as Patricia ?

It was a long and tiresome journey in the crowded streets from the Park, and in the still more crowded bus the atmosphere was stifling. So it was with a sigh of relief that Angela alighted at the street which led to her block of flats.

As she sped upward in the lift Angela was conscious of a strange sensation. It was just as if she had faded out of immediate touch with the things about her ; as if she were moving in some new atmosphere, and all at once she knew that a great demand was about to be made upon her courage, her spirit, and her strength. Yet she was absolutely calm as she let herself in with her latchkey.

Mason met her in the passage.

" Mrs. Bellares is here, ma'am," " and Captain Rayburn : they said as they'd wait for you."

Angela felt her heart lighten suddenly. She was unfeignedly glad to see Rayburn, and she embraced Honor again and again.

" Darling," she said, " how sweet you look ! And so fresh and cool ! Whereas I am a veritable object ! It's simply a scrimmage to get into and out of a bus these days ; and then I saw Maud in the Park, and Maud is never very soothing. But how is it that you two have come here together ? "

" I have been sitting for my portrait, the last sitting," Rayburn answered ; " and I thought a little fresh air would do Mrs. Bellares good, so I persuaded her to let me drive her over to you."

" That was a splendid idea ! " said Angela as she unpinned her veil and slipped out of her nurse's coat. " Maud gave me bad news," she remarked as she sat down on a footstool and leaned her head on her sister's knee.

" What sort of bad news ? " inquired Mrs. Bellares, with a catch in her voice.

" It is about poor Richard Bosworth. It appears that he has developed some serious lung trouble and has to go into a sanatorium."

"I heard that he was ill again," Honor remarked. "He scribbled me a few lines himself, saying how sorry he was that he could not have his portrait finished just now, and adding it would have to wait over till he was quite well again. And was that Maud's only news?"

Angela lifted her head and ruffled her hair.

"No; she said she was going away with Mrs. Bosworth. It seems they've taken a house together and are going to have a lot of people to stay with them. Honestly, you know, those two ought to be ashamed of themselves!" she added a little hotly. "They think of nothing but amusement. Maud did try to do some war-work a little while ago, but she has quite given it up lately. Oh, Honor, it's so nice to see you! I thought I was coming home to a lonely room. You are going to stay with me, aren't you, both of you? I don't know what there is in the house to eat, but I believe Mason can produce a little food!"

"I should love to stay," Rayburn answered; "but I am afraid I can't manage it to-night."

Something, some strange inflection in his voice, some instinct prompted Angela to look at him. She saw then that he was very pale, that his brows were contracted.

She got up quickly, and she spoke almost unconsciously.

"You've got something to tell me; that is why you have both come. Oh, what is it? Please, *please* speak out! Don't be frightened! I shan't make a scene."

"The news came through this afternoon. I thought I would bring it to you myself," Captain Rayburn answered. "I am so thankful that I happened to hear it. I wanted you to be warned before the official telegram reached you."

Honor Bellares had risen, and her arms were round her sister; but Angela was standing quite firmly, only she was ashen-white and her hands were trembling.

"Please, Rex, please!" she said.

"Wynstaye is missing," he answered. "He went over the German lines with another of our machines. They were sent, as far as I can understand, on some special errand. The other man was seen to be shot down, but apparently no one saw what happened to your husband,

only he has not returned. But you are not to jump to conclusions. For my part, I think you may take this comfort to your heart that he is alive!"

She repeated the words almost in a whisper, and then she shuddered.

"A prisoner!" she said. "Oh, how shall I bear this?"

Her sister spoke hurriedly words of comfort, words of tenderness, but she did not hear them; she even pushed Honor's clinging arms aside. She could not listen to Captain Rayburn's attempt to speak encouragingly, hopefully.

She felt as if her heart must burst. Back to her memory there came to her in this dreadful moment how when he had spoken to her—in the few times in which they had discussed his life out yonder—that he had prayed he might never be taken a prisoner.

"Oh, it is not that I care what they do to me," he had said, "it's the misery of being tied up, useless; perhaps sound in every limb, and yet out of it all! It would be maddening!"

It was so seldom that he had spoken to her like this, because she knew that, brave as she was, she had not been able to keep her dread and anguish utterly hidden from him.

As a general rule he had treated his work in a sort of laughing manner; he had called it "good sport." He had made light of danger and difficulty, and in that last all-too-short spell of leave he had scoffed at the idea that he need have been sent to hospital when he had met with the slight disaster about which Mr. Storrington had written to her. He had such a gallant, such an eager, such a strong, splendid spirit. And now he was missing! A prisoner, if he were not already dead.

She could not grasp it all at once. She looked like one dazed, and she walked around the little room, pushing the furniture out of the way just as if she were wound up and could not refuse to move; and then suddenly she looked at Rayburn, and his grave set face, his eyes of pity, called to her.

"I am so sorry," she said. "You mustn't stay. It was good of you to come. I can't thank you; but you have work to do. Please don't stay!"

"I will come back to you, if I may," he answered "That is, if you would care to see me."

She stared at him, scarcely taking in the meaning of his words at first; then she said—

"Yes, I should like you to come back. You may be able to tell me something more." And then she turned to her sister. "Darling, I beg of you not to stay. This is so terrible for you. I—I hope I shall have some of your courage, some of your strength, Honor; but I am afraid I shall fail!"

"Don't send me away," Honor Bellares pleaded. "I can't leave you, my poor little sister! I won't speak to you. I won't ask questions. I just want to be near you."

Angela assented in a dull sort of way. She went on walking up and down and round and about the room long after Captain Rayburn had taken his departure.

He had not spoken to Mrs. Bellares, but their eyes had met and tears had sprung into both of them as he had turned away.

After a while Angela's foot caught against a chair and, stumbling forward, she fell into its depths.

Mrs. Bellares knelt beside her and caressed her hands. They were as cold as ice. Though the evening was very hot and there was so little air, the dreadful shock had driven all the warmth out of Angela's body; she was so exhausted and looked so haggard that her sister's heart was full of anxiety.

Without saying a word, she rose and went to the telephone. She summoned the doctor who attended herself and her child. She begged him to come as soon as possible.

Out in the kitchen Mason was crying softly. She was preparing the evening meal for her mistress, but she was not making very much headway with it, and it was she who put an idea into Honor Bellares's mind—a comforting idea.

"I'm right sure that Mrs. Carter will come just as soon as ever she hears about this," the maid said.

"I will send her a telegram to-morrow morning," Angela's sister answered; then she said to Mason, "I am so anxious about your mistress. I would like to get her to bed. I have rung up for my doctor. He is very kind; he will know what to do for her."

Two or three hours later Captain Rayburn came back to that little flat.

The door was opened to him almost the moment that he reached it, and Mrs. Bellares stood before him.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" she said. "I am so anxious about her. She seems so ill. She hasn't spoken; she just lies like a dead creature. Have you more news?"

He shook his head.

"No; we can't expect to hear anything more for some little while, I'm afraid. I have made every inquiry, but can get nothing but what you already know."

"Poor little Angela!"

"And poor little Honor!" he added tenderly.

She had put out both her hands to him, and he was holding them, pressing them encouragingly.

"Have you had food?" he asked. "And have you sent for a doctor?"

"I couldn't eat anything," she answered him. "The doctor has just gone. He made her swallow a little soup, and then he gave her a cachet. It will make her sleep. Oh, Rex, tell me frankly, what do you feel about Derry? Do you think there is any hope?"

He did not answer her in words, but only looked at her and sighed.

She caught her breath.

"Come in and rest," Honor Bellares said gently. "You look awfully tired."

"I will come in for a few minutes," he answered; and as they passed into the drawing-room he added, "I thought perhaps I might be of some use. Can I go to your studio for you to look after things there? I suppose you will stay here to-night?"

"Oh, yes, I must stay! I should be miserable if I went away; everything is all right at the studio. Nurse is a

great comfort to me, and Chris sleeps through the night, thank goodness!" Then Mrs. Bellares added softly, "You have been so good to-day, Rex. What should I have done without you? And I know that you give Angela a sense of comfort, greater even than she realizes; but we mustn't overtax your goodness."

He answered her almost roughly.

"Don't talk rubbish! You know that there is nothing in life so dear to me as to be of service to you. I only hope I can be of some real use to that poor child. Of course I shall maintain stoutly that while there is no bad news everything is for the best; but I don't mind confessing to you that I am very doubtful." He broke off and paused, frowning; then he said, "Wynstaye was so reckless, so ready to take on any dangerous job, and he has been doing such wonderful things lately. Already he was a marked man with the enemy. Oddly enough, I believe his name came through for the D.S.O. only this morning."

Honor Bellares gave a shuddering sigh, then she said—

"Oh! Rex, she is so young! Oh! if only she could have had her happiness a little longer!"

"We must keep up her courage as much as we possibly can. If he is alive I am afraid he must be going through a very bad time. I can quite believe that about the only thing such a man would dread would be the possibility of being taken a prisoner. There is one good thing—the enemy aviators are much more decent than the other lot. Still it will be a hard fate if he has been caught."

"And then he will worry about her so much," Honor Bellares said in a low voice. "I wasn't quite sure when they married. I thought perhaps it was just a strong fancy with him, that, though of course he could not fail to be attracted by Angela's sweetness and youth, there was nothing deeper. I know now I misjudged him. It was an agony to him to leave her the last time. Will you wait here a moment?" Mrs. Bellares added. "I promised Angela that I would let her know when you came back. She was so anxious to see you again if you came."

She slipped from the room, but was back again almost

immediately with an expression of relief on her tired face.

"She is sleeping soundly, and, oh, I am so thankful! And now you must go, Rex!"

"I can't go," he answered, "till you promise me to take some rest yourself. You know you are not a tower of strength, and I do not think you realize how much strain this has put upon you."

She coloured faintly.

"Oh, I promise that willingly! I am going to lie down now at once. Thank you once again!"

As he rose and walked to the door she stretched out her hand, and with just a little hesitation the man took it, and then he lifted it to his lips.

"Good night!" he said. "I will be round as early as I possibly can in the morning."

CHAPTER XXIX

VERA RADFORD had little time during her hospital duties to give way to sadness or fatigue. Nevertheless she missed Angela in an extraordinary degree. They had been so sympathetic with one another, and there were so many qualities in Derrick Wynstaye's young wife which appealed to the other girl.

Miss Radford had been made the captain of one of the shifts of V.A.D. workers, and was finding it very difficult to keep up her helpers to the necessary number now that the hot weather had come; especially was this the case on Sundays.

There were numerous substitutes who offered themselves, but in many cases they were not of very great use.

Angela had been so quick, so swift-footed, and so resourceful. Many of the girls who came on for Sunday work were tired before they started. They were shop assistants for the most part, and no one more than Vera Radford recognized the unselfishness of these girls in giving up their day of rest and holiday to the hospital. Some, too, were of course very capable; others, though willing, never seemed to grasp how things should go.

The second Sunday after Angela's breakdown was a very hot day. Even in the early morning the sun's rays were powerful.

When Miss Radford arrived at the hospital she found a new V.A.D., one who had not been there before—a very handsome young woman with big dark eyes, rather strongly-marked features, and a splendid crop of dark hair, which she was just about to cover with the white veil when the captain of the shift appeared.

As they met this new-comer stared at Miss Radford and then laughed.

"Hallo!" she said. "How are you?"

Vera Radford paused hesitatingly for an instant, and then she said—

"Oh, how do you do? I didn't recognize you at first."

"No; I expect I look pretty queer in this get-up, don't I? I kind of feel I'm going on for a new turn. One of your usual girls, who is staying where I am, lent me her things, and said she thought you'd be glad to see me. Anyway, I might just as well do something for my country, if it is only scrubbing dishes or washing cups and saucers. I don't mind telling you that I am not over-keen at this class of work," she added bluntly. "I expect you've taken to it like a duck to water. Here, give me a hand! How does one fasten on this thing?"

Vera Radford pinned the veil under the mass of hair.

"Have you just finished a tour, Miss Wynstaye?" she asked later as she bustled about, beginning to arrange the breakfast trays, to be carried up in due course to the various wards.

"Oh, chuck that!" said the other girl. "Call me Winnie. That's my name. Yes, I've been on tour, and I'm dead sick of it. I've got one or two seaside turns to work off, and after that I shall give the provinces a rest. What was your last job?"

"I haven't done anything since the war," answered Vera Radford. Then very quickly she gave her orders, and there was no more time for conversation.

She found her theatrical acquaintance an excellent helper. Though a novice, she was sharp-witted. Then she was so strong, the stairs did not seem to affect her in the least.

When they were together for two or three minutes Miss Wynstaye would drop into theatrical gossip, and her conversation was slangy in the extreme; but Miss Radford found her less blatant than she had been when they had first come into contact with one another.

When the breakfasts had been served, and after that all the silver and cups and saucers had been washed up, the two busy workers found themselves with a short spell of time in which to rest.

"See here!" said Miss Wynstaye. "Do you suppose I could slip out into the Park? I just must have a cigarette." In the same breath she added, "It churns one up, don't it, to see a boy like that one in that small ward? My! If I had had both my legs off, and one arm too, I guess I shouldn't be so keen about living! It's queer, ain't it? He don't seem one bit depressed; and he ate quite a fine breakfast. The pluck of these boys just gets me!"

"I'll come out with you," said Miss Radford, "at least for a little while. I generally go to church in this hour, but I don't think I'll attempt it to-day, it's so hot."

As they made their way across into the Park and found a cool place under the trees Miss Wynstaye remarked, as she lit a cigarette—

"Of course I've done my bit playing the fool to the wounded in hospital, but I ain't been brought in such close contact as this work brings one. It makes one feel wuzzy if one stops to think what it all means. It's blue enough saying 'Good-bye!' to the boys, but this is worse. I've lost more pals than I can count. I suppose you've got some one out at the Front?"

Miss Radford checked a little sigh and told her about her brothers.

"I haven't got any brothers. Sometimes I'm glad and sometimes I'm not," answered the other girl. "I'd hate 'em to go and I'd hate 'em to stay."

She smoked in silence for a moment or two, and then she said—

"My! Don't it seem like a mad dream? All the world's changed. Everything's upside down. Just to see all the poor chaps going round on crutches or with empty sleeves, or with their poor blinded eyes, makes one ask oneself no end of questions. When I see what they've done to such hundreds of our men I feel I'd like to go myself and throw a bomb, or shoot something or somebody. Look here," she said suddenly, "will you come and have supper with me to-night? I'm staying in an hotel—well, they call it an hotel," she added, "but it's really a boarding-house; but I've got a sitting-room to myself on the second floor."

She gave the address, and then she added—

"Don't bother to wait about; just walk up if nobody is there, and if anybody meets you say you're going to see Miss Wynstaye, and that she's expecting you."

Vera looked at her quickly.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I'm not free this evening." After a little hesitation, as though debating with herself whether she should say more, "Oddly enough, I'm going to sit for an hour with a friend who has the same name as yourself. She usually works here, but she is in great trouble just now, and I'm afraid she's very ill. Her husband, who is in the Flying Corps, is reported missing. You may have seen something about it or him in the papers? His name is Derrick Wynstaye."

The other woman flung her cigarette away, and a curious expression swept across her face.

"Oh, so you know his wife, do you?" she said. "Yes, I've read about him. Did something awfully fine, didn't he? And he's missing? That's a cruel thing! What's she like?" she asked abruptly.

"Oh, just a bit of a girl?" answered Vera Radford. "Awfully sweet, very pretty and delicate, with the most glorious red hair! If she were not so unhappy I should be rather glad that she should be resting, for she was doing a lot of work—too much, in fact. Her sister is Mrs. Bellares, the painter. Perhaps you know her work?"

The actress shrugged her shoulders.

"Not me! I don't care two pins about pictures. I never did care about anything but going on the stage. I'm not what you call artistic. Is it time to go in?" she inquired as Miss Radford got up.

"No, there is no necessity for you to come in just yet, if you like to stay here a little longer! But I think I ought to go back, and perhaps I had better prepare you," Miss Radford added, with a faint smile. "We are likely to be awfully rushed getting the luncheons served; we are so short-handed to-day. I suppose it is the heat."

"Well, I'll come along in a minute or two," said Miss Winnie Wynstaye.

She sat looking straight ahead of her for some while after Miss Radford had left her, and there was a scowl on her handsome face. Evidently she was thinking out some matter which was not a pleasant one.

Many people glanced at her as they passed. Though she wore the regulation uniform, she did not look at home in it. She was too striking-looking, too bold, and the nurse's garb gave her an extra touch of showiness.

Her appearance was quickly noted by such invalids as were permitted to be on the balcony as she approached the hospital once again. Usually Miss Wynstaye regarded all such attention as her proper due; to-day she scarcely noticed it.

Miss Radford found her very silent when they were seated having their own lunch; but afterwards, when they were busy in the wards again, she was as quick a helper as she had been in the morning; and when the time came for them to part Vera Radford held out her hand with a smile and said—

"I hope you will come again. You are a stunning helper! I never expected to get things through half so quickly."

Miss Wynstaye looked pleased, and then she shrugged her shoulders.

"If I am here I'll come; but I don't know whether I shall be here next week. Will that girl you were telling me about be back by then?" she asked in a brusque way.

"I don't know," Vera Radford answered. "I scarcely think so. She simply adored her husband; and he was devoted to her. They were only married in the early part of this year. It is the uncertainty that is so trying to her. She dreads to hear any moment that there has been a mistake and the worst may have happened to him."

"Well, she's only one of thousands!" said the other, a little roughly. "It isn't much consolation, but it's the truth."

On leaving the hospital Winnie Wynstaye took a taxi and drove to the place where she was staying.

It was in the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury. Once upon a time it had been the mansion of a nobleman, possibly a house that had been the centre of fashion, and now, though it was a boarding-house, it had a fine air. The entrance-hall was wide, the staircase wide too, the rooms lofty.

Miss Wynstaye's rooms were on the second floor and at the back. They looked over a stretch of garden, one of those oases of green that are to be found so unexpectedly in the very heart of the City.

A yapping little dog welcomed her as she pushed open the door of her sitting-room. In a window a canary was warbling sweetly.

Miss Wynstaye sat down, and the dog jumped immediately on her lap. She fondled it for a moment and then pushed it from her.

With a glance at the canary her face clouded.

"Oh, shut up!" she said. "One would think you'd get tired of making that noise!"

She sat for some little while smoking in that same kind of sullen mood, and then she got up, took off the uniform, slipped on a loose gown of white muslin, not too clean; and then she gave the dog some biscuit, and took the bird-cage from the window, filled its small glasses with water, and put in fresh seed.

One saw in these little actions that there was a warm heart beating under her rough and slangy exterior.

Her unusual exertions of the morning had made her very hot and tired, and for a little while she stretched herself on the couch and pretended to go to sleep; but something was moving in her mind to make her restless. At any rate she did not remain on the couch; she got up, glanced at herself in the long mirror of her wardrobe, and then, with a shrug of her shoulders, went downstairs.

There was no one to be seen on this very hot Sunday afternoon; she turned into the telephone office, and without consulting the book, she rang up a certain number.

After a while a man's voice answered her impatient inquiry.

"No, ma'am, the Major is not in. He's gone into the

country for the day. Yes, ma'am, he came up late last night, and he's going back to camp to-night." In answer to another inquiry from her the servant replied, " Oh, yes, I shall see the Major to-night ! He's coming back here to pick up his bag. He usually goes by the 10.10 from Victoria. Who shall I say rang up, ma'am ? "

" Oh, it don't matter ! I'll write," said Miss Wynstaye. As she replaced the receiver Miss Wynstaye stood still and said to herself, with a certain grim look about her mouth, " Victoria—ten past ten, that's my cue ! "

Then she went back to her room, and, after smoking several cigarettes, she got out of her wrapper and put on a smart frock. In a little while some friends would be arriving, one of whom was a rather important person in close touch with London theatrical managers, the class of individual whom she was anxious to cultivate.

" If my fine gentleman thinks to push me into the country for the winter, he's dead out for once, and I don't care how soon he knows it ! "

CHAPTER XXX

IN the very same week that the papers were reporting the name of Derrick Wynstaye among the casualties as missing, the news came through of the death of Sir Gerald Fotherington's second son.

He had been killed in action, and many paragraphs were written about his gallantry, and many messages of sympathy were sent to his father and family.

Hugo Fotherington had not returned to the Front. He had been disqualified for all but very light duty on account of a very severe wound which he had sustained very early in the war. Truth to tell, he was no coward, and although he had met with no success so far, he left no stone unturned to get back to the fighting line.

Major Fotherington had not been to see his father for some time.

Their last interview had been so unpleasant that they neither of them sought to repeat it, and in fact all correspondence between them had been carried out of late through the medium of lawyers ; but when he heard of his brother's death the young man sat down and wrote just a few well-chosen words to Sir Gerald.

An answer came to that letter, not written by his father but by his sister, who really reigned as mistress at Wycherley.

Miss Fotherington was the eldest member of Sir Gerald's family—two or three years older than Hugo—and between himself and this sister there had never been much love lost ; but now she wrote almost affectionately, letting her brother realize that she was very anxious indeed about their father.

It was this letter which had taken Major Fotherington out of town this very hot Sunday. True, his sister had not given him an invitation, but he construed her letter as meaning that she would like to see him, and he snatched at

the chance of coming to a better understanding with his father.

Death was a great leveller. As he put it to himself, " the old man may probably think a little better of me now that I am the only boy left ! " It was certainly very necessary that Sir Gerald should show some interest in his remaining son, not only a sentimental one but a material one, for Hugo Fotherington was hemmed about by trouble. He had been in monetary difficulties for some time now. Just after the commencement of hostilities he had been able to stave off threatening conditions ; but now, when every one was settling down to the conviction that the war was going to be a long one, several creditors were becoming unpleasantly assiduous in reminding him of their existence. Hence it was most necessary that he should make friends again with his father, and only a natural thing that he should feel hopeful of settling arrangements to his own satisfaction.

It always gave him a little thrill of envy and pride mingled when he arrived at Wycherley, his father's old country house.

Sir Gerald had always maintained a certain amount of state, and even now, when the war had robbed him of most of the young men on his property, the same note of semi-grandeur prevailed. There was nothing ostentatious about him ; he was simply a man born to a high position—a man resolved to regard that position as one full of responsibility, to carry with it obligations to be fulfilled, no matter at what cost to himself.

Miss Fotherington received her brother. She had just been to Mass. The Fotheringtons were Catholics, and they had their own private chapel in the Wycherley grounds. Lucy Fotherington was pale and looked worn. As a matter of fact it was evident to her brother that she was agitated as well as unhappy.

After they had exchanged a few sentences, she told her brother, not without hesitation, that he would be unable to see Sir Gerald.

Major Fotherington walked to one of the long open windows and stood looking out at the beautiful view which

these windows gave. It was very hot, but there were plenty of old shady trees in the gardens, which had a soothing, tranquillizing atmosphere. He clenched and unclenched his hands, and turned rather sharply on his sister at last.

"Speak the truth, Lucy," he said, "and don't prevaricate! It isn't the shock of poor George's death that prevents our meeting; it simply means that my father refuses to see me! Isn't that the truth?"

Miss Fotherington drew her breath sharply and closed her eyes just for a second.

She was like her brother, only much older—an aristocratic-looking woman, pathetic, too, in her heavy black.

"Perhaps you can answer that question as well as I can, Hugo," she said in a low voice.

He uttered an angry exclamation.

"I think you might have studied me a little more. It is not very pleasant to be brought down here and then to be practically refused admittance."

"I certainly did not bring you down, Hugo, although I did hope you would be able to see father whenever you came," Lucy Fotherington answered. "You misjudge me. When the bad news came through, I spoke to father about you. It was because I imagined that he really would be glad to see you that I wrote to you as I did. Only this morning, however, I realized I had made a mistake."

"What, happened this morning?"

Miss Fotherington did not reply immediately, and then she said—

"It is not only poor George's death. Father is greatly troubled about Derrick Wynstaye. He had a letter from Derrick only a few days ago. It came through after the announcement had appeared in the paper that he was missing. I hesitated to give it to father at first; then I felt I had no right to keep it back, although it seemed so sad for the letter to come when Derry may even be dead for all we know."

An uneasy expression passed over Hugo Fotherington's face.

"Oh!" he said sharply. "I didn't know Derrick and the old man corresponded."

"I think father has heard several times, and we wrote of course at the time of Derrick's marriage. Father was extremely pleased with the letter which he received from Derrick about that time. Then for a little while he seemed to be very angry about something. He didn't tell me anything —you know he doesn't speak very much—but I gathered that he had discovered something that Derrick had done which had annoyed him and troubled him extremely."

"May I smoke?" Hugo Fotherington asked suddenly. "You are sure you don't mind it in here?"

She assented to his request with a faint smile, and as he lit a cigarette he half closed his eyes and moved back again to the long open window.

"And then they began writing again, eh?"

Lucy Fotherington looked at her brother a little uneasily.

They had drifted very far apart in late years. There was something about him to-day which made her wish he had not come.

"I suppose so," she answered a little coldly; "but I really know nothing definitely. It is very sad about Derrick, so terrible for his young wife," she added in an involuntary fashion.

Her brother gave her a quick glance, and as he shrugged his shoulders he said—

"Oh! I don't know! It is a game of chance with all of us. I expect, if the truth were known, Derry was up to some tomfoolery. Well, if I am not to see my father," he added in the same breath, "I may as well go out and sit under the trees. Do you lunch at the usual hour?"

Miss Fotherington said— "Yes"—adding, "Aunt Isobel is here. You know she was poor George's godmother."

Fotherington made no reply, but sauntered out into the hot sunshine and strolled in a leisurely way across the broad lawn. He was outwardly calm, but inwardly raging.

The irony of his position was forced home upon him by this empty visit.

He thought to have caught his father unawares, as it

were, in a sense to have compelled a certain amount of parental interest. It was only natural, with his two brothers gone, no one to dispute or to share, that he should have buoyed himself up with this hope. Surely Sir Gerald might have met him half-way ?

He chewed his cigarette so viciously that he had to fling it away unsmoked, and his hands trembled a little as he took out his case and lit another.

He wondered uneasily what had passed in the recent letters which had been coming from Derrick Wynstaye, and he cursed the ill-chance which had prevented him from meeting Derrick.

He knew the other man so well. Though they were in a sense enemies, Hugo Fotherington quickly convinced himself that if he could have met Derrick, could have made a direct appeal to him, could have put things in front of the other man, he would not be standing in such a precarious position as that which he now occupied. And yet paradoxically, while he regretted not having thrown himself, as it were, on the clemency of Derrick Wynstaye, his hatred and jealousy for this man had never been greater than it was at this moment.

Angela's loyalty and proud devotion and defence of her husband had sent the envy still deeper into his heart, embittered his old animosity in an extraordinary degree.

He threw himself into one of the comfortable chairs and sat looking at his old home with moody eyes. Once a savage expression flashed into them.

" At least I can't be cut away from all this," he said to himself ; " and he can't live for ever ! "

But even this unfilial exultation in what lay for him in the future could not bring consolation for his immediate troubles, and the peace and the beauty of his surroundings served to irritate and to mock at him.

When the sound of the gong reached him from the house announcing that luncheon was served he rose with a short laugh.

" Perhaps it would have been as well," he said, " if I had gone in George's place ! "

CHAPTER XXXI

CAPTAIN RAYBURN was untirinig in his attempt to trace something reliable and definite about Derrick Wynstaye.

The faith which burned like a flame in Angela's heart and spirit, the belief that her husband was not dead, inspired and incited him to further effort even when almost overwhelming facts were ranged against the possibility of that hope ever being materialized.

It had been proved only too surely that the machine Wynstaye had been flying had been destroyed and that his observer had perished, for the body of this other man had been found.

The extraordinary part of it was that, though this dead observer had been discovered and identified, there was not the slightest sign of anything to point to what had happened to his pilot.

Rayburn discussed this strange absence of any trace of Wynstaye with Honor Bellares.

"No one seems to know what to make of it," he said. "But, speaking from my own personal feeling, I feel unfortunately that there is not the remotest chance of his having escaped with his life. What I imagine may have happened is that in coming down the aeroplane may have turned turtle and that Wynstaye must have been flung out in the rapid descent, his body falling possibly some distance from the place where the machine finally came to land."

Honor was looking, if possible, more fragile and paler than ever. Her sorrow and anxiety for her sister had been, and still was, sharp, for Angela had been so ill. There had indeed been two or three days when the young wife's life had hung in the balance; now she was gradually creeping back to a semblance of strength. But Honor felt that it was only the unquenchable faith and hope which lived in

her heart that was drawing Angela away from the edge of the grave.

"It does seem very strange," she said to Captain Rayburn. "Sometimes I feel that you are right not to hope; then again at times I feel that Angela's faith is justified and that sooner or later news will come through. Only," she added, with a sharp sigh, "the time is going on. I suppose we ought to have known something definite by now?"

"So many strange things happen in this war," Rayburn answered. "One must be prepared for anything. For my part, though the suspense is terrible, and though my common sense urges me against any suggestion of hope, I rejoice that nothing definite has come through. So long as she is not officially informed that he is dead, she is justified in cherishing the belief that she may still see him again. If this had happened a little while ago," Captain Rayburn added, "I might have better understood matters; but since the big advance I have lost my bearings. It is all new ground over which our men are working now. The battle of the Somme swept away all our old landmarks. It will be so strange to me when I go out again."

Honor Bellares looked at him. They were in her studio. She had gone back to her work in the mornings; a pleasant and a very clever nurse was looking after Angela. Moreover, Alice Carter had been able to leave the farm for a while and was once more in command at the little flat. Consequently Mrs. Bellares was relieved of the acute anxiety and responsibility which had been her lot in the very beginning.

It was a relief and a help to her to be back at work. No one knew, even she herself scarcely realized, how much of that relief and help she had drawn from Rex Rayburn's unfaltering sympathy and friendship.

"But are you going out again?" she asked now hurriedly. "I thought you were fixed here. I hope you will not go just yet awhile!"

His face flushed a little.

"I hardly know when I shall get my marching orders,"

he said. "I have applied for permission to return to my regiment, or what remains of it; but they are holding me up here. Of course," he added, "I know that I am able to be of use, but I don't like to be out of things."

"I understand. Still I do hope you won't go just yet awhile," Mrs. Bellares repeated, and her voice was very soft. "I'm afraid I am very selfish; but, frankly, I am relying upon you to do so much for Angela. First and foremost, I want you to join issue with me and get her away from town. Mother is very anxious that she should stay with them; but I am not pressing this, because I know that my father is not at all well, and looking after him is quite as much as my mother can manage. But Angela ought to go away."

"Have you made any plans for her?" inquired Captain Rayburn.

Honor shook her head.

"No; it has been rather difficult to make plans." She hesitated for an instant, and then she said, "Still, there is a chance——" She paused, and then said, "I think I told you the other day that some letters had been coming through from Wycherley, both from Sir Gerald Fotherington and his daughter?"

"Yes, you told me that."

"Well, since I last heard I have had a visit from Miss Fotherington. She was very nice, very kind, and came with a message from her father. Both expressed themselves as being greatly distressed to hear about Angela's illness and they have begged me to persuade her to stay with them at Wycherley. It seems that Sir Gerald Fotherington is extremely anxious that she should do this, and I think it might be a very good arrangement, only of course I don't want to lose touch with the child."

"Have you broached the subject to her?" asked Captain Rayburn.

"I just mentioned it, and I have discussed it fully with Mrs. Carter, who is extremely eager that Angela should go to the Fotheringtons'. She seems very pleased that Sir Gerald has shown this amount of attention; indeed it seems to

have surprised her a good deal. Miss Fotherington spoke with real sympathy about poor Derry. I told her that for the moment it was impossible to move Angela, but that I hoped we may be able to persuade her to go at least for a little time to Wycherley when she is well enough to travel."

"And you?" said Rayburn suddenly. "What are you going to do? Do you realize how much you need change? If you don't take care of yourself, Honor, one of these days you will slip away out of sight, out of reach!"

"Oh, I am not so ethereal as all that!" Honor Bellares answered, with a little nervous laugh.

Captain Rayburn picked up his cap and his gloves. "Well, I must be going. I'm running out of town this afternoon with Cheviot, going to inspect the new munition factory which he has put up in his grounds. We hope to get it into working order within the next fortnight."

He held out his hand with a smile.

Honor Bellares put her small hand into his and found herself clinging to it.

"As I said just now, I am very selfish, Rex," she said. "But, honestly, I don't know what we shall all do when you go away."

His hand closed over her trembling fingers and then he stooped and kissed them.

"So long as a choice is left to me I shall not go now that I know you really need me," he said, and then they separated.

There were tears in Honor Bellares's eyes as she turned back to her work, and she found that she was trembling so much that it was impossible to do any more, so she set aside her brushes and took off her painting overall and went to see her baby.

In the nursery somehow sorrow, anxiety, and every difficulty seemed to melt away. She remained with the child some time; then she put on her hat and coat and went her usual journey to Angela's flat.

As she travelled along she was thinking of some words which she had read the night before.

They were applicable not only to her sister, but to herself.

"Sorrows are gardeners; they plant flowers along waste places and teach vines to cover barren heaps."

Her thoughts were also busy with Angela.

She recalled how exquisite had been the sympathy and the loving thought which the young girl had lavished upon her when her great grief had come, and now it was her turn to minister. In truth, however, she found herself facing a grief, a loss, if possible, even more barren and blighting than her own. For she at least had her little child to bring warmth and a joy into her life, and the child that would have come to her sister would never be born now. So it was that she marvelled in a sense—well as she knew her Angela's nature—at the resilience of spirit which sustained the young wife, at the steadfast, unfluctuating glow of faith which like a star led Angela along her path to health and strength again.

And then from her sister her thoughts went to the man who had just left her.

It was almost a shock to Honor Bellares to realize how dreadful was the mere suggestion that Captain Rayburn should go back to France.

Among her friends he had always a place apart in her thoughts; but it was reserved for this moment to show her how much he was to her, how much he signified, what a rock of strength his friendship really was. And in this moment too she seemed to see into his heart; she seemed to realize the struggle that had gone on there, how hope and despair had fought with one another.

It was almost a pain to have to recognize that she had so much power over another human creature as she undoubtedly possessed over this man.

Once Angela had said of her sister, "Honor will never forget."

It was a truth. Honor Bellares would never forget her husband or the glamour of their love; but it was not only time that tempered her grief. All the circumstances with which she was surrounded were helping to awaken her to the fact that in these days of stress and sorrow and anguish of heart (which was the lot of practically all those

round and about her) it was not permissible for any one creature to live wholly in the past.

Thus Rex Rayburn had a claim upon her—not merely the claim of a man who loved her unselfishly, anxiously, devotedly, but the claim of one who might at any moment be sent to the carnage beyond the seas, who might in a very short time have passed out of her reach altogether.

When she entered Angela's room that day the girl saw something new written in Honor's face, something which made her heart thrill and her pulses beat—not a personal emotion, but one awakened by the remembrance of Rayburn.

It seemed to Angela that, though perhaps he was ignorant of this, the man was slowly but surely arriving near to happiness.

She herself declared that she was much better.

"I slept quite a lot last night," she told her sister, "and I've eaten a very big breakfast. Oh, if you don't believe me, go and ask Alice! Besides, I walked in here all by myself. What do you say to that?"

Honor Bellares knelt beside her and kissed her tenderly.

"Darling," she said, "it is good of you to try to get better. You know what it means to all of us."

"Oh, yes, I want to get well!" said Angela, and there was an eager note in her voice. "Just for a little while I didn't care. I suppose that was because I was so weak. I just didn't want to do anything but lie still and dream. Now that is all changed. I want to be myself again. I want to get back into my old ways. I think I ought to be able to go back to the hospital in a month's time, don't you?"

Mrs. Bellares checked the impulse to protest against this.

"Well, we'll see, darling!" was her answer. "You mustn't rush things, you know. You know what I should like, Angela? I should like you to make haste and get well enough to have your boxes packed, and see you depart into the country."

Mrs. Bellares had risen and was now sitting in a chair so near that their hands could meet.

"Well, I'm going to do just exactly what you want, Honor, you are such a transparent piece of goods!" Angela added, with a faint laugh. "I can read what is written in your heart so clearly. You want me to go to Wycherley. Well, I am going. Yes, I am going not only because you wish it and Alice urges it, but because I feel that Derry would be so happy if I were to do this."

She smiled her wan pretence of a smile as she listened to Mrs. Bellares's warm approval.

"Yes, I know this will please you, though you understand, don't you, darling, that if I studied my own wishes I should not move from here." She broke off and her face contracted. Then she said in a tired voice, "I am going to Wycherley because, as Alice has pointed out to me, it is my duty to accept the hand of friendship which Sir Gerald Fotherington holds out; but I shall not stay very long. This is my home, and—and—I like to imagine Derry knows I am here waiting for him—always waiting."

CHAPTER XXXII

BUT it was quite three weeks before Angela was permitted to leave London ; and even then she was not allowed to travel by herself. Miss Fotherington had begged her to bring a maid, or even a trained nurse if that was necessary, and to Mason's great delight she was chosen to accompany her young mistress.

Mrs. Carter had arranged to remain a few days after Angela's departure to shut up the flat, a plan which she discussed with Mrs. Bellares, avoiding all mention of it to Angela, however.

"The child wants the place to be kept open," she said ; "but there is no sense in doing that. By this time, alas, we must make up our minds that the boy is gone ! Despite the fact that there is no proof either that he has been made prisoner or that he is dead, circumstances all point to the fact that we shall never see him again ! "

And then Mrs. Carter gave Honor Bellares a letter which she explained had come just at the time when Angela had been so ill. It was unopened, inscribed in a rather peculiar handwriting, and bore on the back the printed address of Mrs. Richard Bosworth's town house.

"I feel as if I had been doing something very dreadful ! " she confessed ; "but I could not bring myself to give her this letter. I thought perhaps you might open it, as you opened all the other correspondence."

But Mrs. Bellares hesitated.

"That was different," she said. "I had to open the letters in case there was anything to answer ; but now Angela is well enough to deal with her own letters, and I think she must open this one herself."

"Perhaps you're right," Alice Carter agreed ; but she looked troubled. The matter, however, slipped from her mind ; she was so occupied in making all necessary arrange-

ments for Angela's comfort and herself travelled down with the girl and Mason.

She did not go up to the house, but took temporary farewell of Angela at the railway station, after she had seen Derrick Wynstaye's wife enter the spacious car sent to meet her.

Angela parted with Mrs. Carter with sharp regret, but she sat forward, watching the road eagerly as she swept along in the car. She had heard so much of Wycherley from her husband, and now seemed to be able to recognize various places by his description. And yet she was wholly unprepared for the beauty and the wonderful sense of dignity and calm which prevailed in the old house.

Miss Fotherington met her with outstretched hands and words of anxious inquiry, and Sir Gerald came into the hall to give her a welcome.

Angela was deeply touched, for she realized at once that this courtesy and attention on the old man's part was the expression of the homage he desired to pay to her husband.

She had been given two of the finest rooms in the old house.

Before she went down to dinner Angela wrote two letters, one to her mother and one to her sister Honor.

She seemed, if possible, drawn closer to her mother these days, though they saw one another so seldom ; but the grief which was devastating her heart (even against that wonderful star-like hope),was creeping slowly but surely into her mother's heart ; for Mrs. Fayne was very anxious and troubled about her husband. The duties of a special constable which he had taken up so eagerly and fulfilled so vigilantly had made enormous demands upon him. Then, too, the blight of his material troubles had well-nigh crushed the spirit of Angela's father, and he was now an invalid. Though her mother had entreated her to go to them, Angela had refused to do this, at least just for the moment.

But just because she did not see her, Angela thought all the more about her mother ; and so her first act was to scribble a few affectionate words announcing her arrival

and speaking in the warmest terms of Sir Gerald and his daughter.

"It is going to do me no end of good, I know it, I feel it," she wrote. "When you see me again I shall be a large robust person!"

She wrote in something of the same strain to Mrs. Bellares; and Mason took the letters down to be dispatched the first thing in the morning.

The pleasant impression Angela had received on arrival at Wycherley deepened as the days went by.

She found herself not merely a welcome guest, but an honoured one. Miss Fotherington quickly lost her heart to her, and her coming seemed to have brought a tangible sense of comfort to Sir Gerald.

There was a motive underlying all his actions where Angela was concerned which he did not share even with his daughter. It was this motive which had impelled him to instruct Miss Fotherington to beg Derrick's wife to come to Wycherley; and though he succumbed so quickly to the wistful charm which Angela exercised, it was always that motive which urged him to show kindness, consideration and homage to Derrick Wynstaye's wife.

When she had been a week at Wycherley her sister Honor wrote to her and enclosed the letter which Mrs. Carter had given her.

Angela did not open Patricia Bosworth's letter immediately. It gave her a little painful thrill at her heart to hold that letter in her hand. A woman's instinct is so sure in some ways; and she felt convinced that this was no expression of conventional sympathy, but that this letter was intended to hurt her, and hurt her badly!

When she did open it she was alone in the garden.

Autumn had come almost suddenly; a chill feeling prevailed, and the leaves were being swept from the trees by the gusts of wind. Mason had insisted upon her mistress putting on a warm coat and stout shoes. Though she was well protected, Angela shivered as she walked under the trees.

It was not only the cold wind which brought that shiver.

But she tore open the letter at last. It had no beginning; it rushed straight through into what the writer had to say; and evidently it had been set down in a violent unconsidered fashion.

It was hysterical—yet determined.

"Derrick is gone," it started; "and you will get all the sympathy! But you know as well as I do that Derry was never yours! He belonged to me. He was always mine. He never cared for anybody else. Because I threw him out of my life made no real difference; and no matter what he may have told you, the truth is that he was so bitter and so revengeful on me that he wanted to hurt me, he didn't care how. Is it likely that he would care for you? Is it likely that he would have forgotten so soon? If you are fool enough to refuse to see the truth of this, and fall back on any empty, meaningless protestations he may have made to you, I can open your eyes, I can show you letters written by this man whom you have married only a week or two old when he made you his wife. And now he is gone and you can parade your grief; the glory that belongs to him you can claim. I don't want the glory or the honour. I want only that which is mine. I dare say lots of people would say I was cruel, abominably cruel, in writing to you like this, but there are certain griefs which tear away the last shred of convention. I am the woman Derrick Wynstaye loved. The fact that I was a blind fool and threw him away can't alter these great facts, nor can his marriage really change the truth. He was mine; he is mine still!"

As she read through this impassioned and unbalanced epistle the trembling went from Angela's limbs, and into her heart there came a great calmness. Suddenly the present surroundings were swept away from her and she was back in that day of sunshine, she and Derry alone together under the trees in Richmond Park. He was kneeling at her feet. He was entreating her never to doubt his faith nor the truth of what he had told her.

So vivid was the recollection that just for an instant she seemed to feel the tangible nearness of his presence.

She seemed to look into his eyes and read the absolute honesty and sincerity which had prompted his words; and just for that instant the splendour of that moment when they had been together (and the world with all its present horrors and miseries and troubles and sorrows seemed to have left them apart, and alone) held her in sway. Even after the vision had passed and she realized that she was out in the wind-swept gardens far, far away from that summer day, the glow which the recollection had brought remained as a kind of armour.

She crushed Patricia Bosworth's letter in her hand and, turning, she went back to the house.

When she was in her own room she stood in front of the fire and debated whether she should destroy the letter. To keep it was to keep something poisonous, something which might yet do harm; so she flung it into the heart of the fire and watched the flames blaze and destroy the paper; and as the last flicker died out she felt as if she had cleansed herself, cutting herself away from an enemy who had desired not merely to hurt her, but to dishonour the man she loved.

When she wrote to her sister she just touched on this letter.

"You were quite right to send it on," she wrote. "It was a foolish letter; but I have destroyed it, and I shall of course not trouble to answer it."

Then Angela gave a little account of her doings at Wycherley and wrote warmly, even affectionately, of her host and hostess. "Last night Sir Gerald spoke to me for the first time about Derry. I have felt ever since I came here that he wanted to talk to me, but that he was afraid he would upset me. Sir Gerald was very sweet and kind, and said such wonderful things about Derry. He told me it was only quite recently that he had learnt not merely to know my husband's real character, but to honour it. The words he used to me, Honor dear, were these: 'I feel humiliated when I look back and remember how I mis-

judged the boy, and I bitterly regret my lack of sympathy and my prejudice. Had I the chance to live all that over again I should act differently.' How I wish Derry could have heard him say this! It would have meant so much to him." At the end of her letter Angela wrote: "Sir Gerald and Lucy both want me to regard Wycherley as my home. They even urge me to give up the flat; but this I have told them I could not possibly do. I will come here as often as I can, but I must live in my own dear little home where we were so happy together. I could not make any other place my home."

CHAPTER XXXIII

MRS. BOSWORTH and Maud Fayne had carried out their summer plans. They had taken the house in Cornwall, and they had had relays of guests to stay with them, and they had both pretended to themselves that they were thoroughly enjoying their existence.

They were pre-eminently well suited to one another. Both extremely selfish and both equally well capable of looking after their own interests.

Just before the end of the season Maud had received a large addition to her income. The aunt who had adopted her died suddenly, and through the solicitors Miss Fayne received the agreeable news that she benefited very largely by the deceased lady's death and will ; a quantity of jewellery came to her, some furniture, and a lump sum of money. This put Maud on a slightly different footing with Patricia Bosworth ; it certainly increased her importance and her position in a social sense.

But it served also to intensify the selfishness and the hardness of her nature. Though it was now in her power to do much for others, she turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the claims of charity, and was careful to avoid either corresponding with or seeing her mother, whose financial position was becoming increasingly difficult !

Mr. Fayne's breakdown in health meant his practical withdrawal from his business, and his physical condition made heavy inroads on the very modest income which was left to him.

As yet Angela was not aware of this. She had been too ill to be given the story of her mother's troubles, and so all the outside help that had been forthcoming had been supplied by Honor.

Just about the time that Mrs. Bellares received the letter Angela had written her, a pathetic little note came from

her mother. Mrs. Fayne wrote deploring the fact that her husband's strength seemed to be getting less every day, and that her own anxieties were in consequence becoming very heavy.

It gave Honor Bellares a pang as she read this letter to realize how much her mother must be suffering, when she humiliated herself to beg her daughter to make application to Maud for some monetary help.

" You have done more than enough, my darling child," she wrote. " I can't drain your resources. And you have your child, and so many expenses ; but Maud is now a rich woman, and I feel it is her duty to help your father. But I am such a coward. I can't bring myself to write to her. That is why I am asking you to approach her for me."

Mrs. Bellares put this letter on one side ; but all the time she was working she was thinking about it. The task of approaching her eldest sister was just as unpleasant to her, and indeed she shrank from the task. But the thought that her parents might be actually in need braced her to take action.

As luck would have it a post card from Miss Fayne had reached her that morning also. Maud wrote to say that she was in London, that she was staying at an hotel until she had found some other flat or house suitable. She asked her sister to ring her up. Instead of doing this, Honor Bellares wrote her a few lines asking her to make an appointment to see her.

Maud's answer was sent by telephone. She rang up to say that she would expect Mrs. Bellares to luncheon with her the next day.

Honor had scarcely answered this message before the telephone rang again, and Captain Rayburn's voice was heard asking if he might run up and see her for a few minutes. She assented gladly, and moved about her studio, putting things away and setting the place in order, with a little colour in her cheeks and a light of pleasure in her eyes.

She saw in an instant when he entered the studio that

he looked worried. Even as they shook hands she put her anxiety into words.

"You have something to tell me, Rex. Have you any news? Have they——" She could not finish the sentence.

He pressed her hands tenderly.

"No; I have no news about poor Wynstaye himself, but something in connexion with him; something ridiculous and yet at the same time unpleasant."

"Sit down in that easy chair," said Mrs. Bellares. "Does this room feel cold to you? I have had all the windows open. I have been working here for so many hours it seemed stuffy to me."

He shook his head with a faint smile.

"It is always delightful in your studio. You are sure you don't mind if I smoke."

She smiled and brought him some matches; and then her face grew grave again.

"What is wrong?"

"You know that Maud is in town," Captain Rayburn answered.

"Yes; I have heard from her, and we have made an appointment to meet to-morrow."

"I would rather you did not see Maud just now," Rayburn said almost impulsively. "She sent for me late yesterday afternoon. I found her in a curious mood, almost excited and certainly not sympathetic."

"She has been living in the same house with Mrs. Bosworth for so long, no doubt she has been influenced; although," Honor Bellares said with her faint smile breaking on her lips again, "Maud was never very sympathetic."

"Yes, I know she and Patricia Bosworth have been together, and I make allowances for that fact; but Maud had some absurd rigmarole to give me, which she declared was founded on fact, otherwise I might have supposed that Mrs. Bosworth had invented it."

Honor Bellares drew up another chair on the other side of the fire-place and held one small hand between her face and the fire.

"Yes, Rex?" she said.

Captain Rayburn screwed up his brows. He seemed to find it difficult to speak at first, then he said—

"I'll give you the story just as Maud gave it to me. It appears that when they were in Cornwall they motored in one evening, a large party, to a theatre in Falmouth; some touring company was performing a revue, and the management had advertised the special engagement of a certain actress for the week. This actress Maud describes as a handsome sort of animal, clever in a sense, but evidently not a very refined person. What immediately attracted her attention, however, was the fact that she was called by the name of Wynstaye—Miss Winnie Wynstaye. And then (as far as I can understand) one of their party brought them the startling information that the management had just announced that this young woman was none other than the wife of Derrick Wynstaye, the flying man about whose fate there was so much mystery."

Mrs. Bellares's face contracted for an instant and then she gave a faint little laugh.

"What an absurd mistake, but go on, Rex."

"Maud was most eager to impress upon me that neither she nor Patricia Bosworth were content to leave the matter at that; that they made inquiries, extensive inquiries, and had even interviewed this actress themselves."

Honor Bellares felt her heart beating very fast.

"Do you mean to say that this woman declares that she is, or was Derry's wife?"

"So Maud gave me to understand," Rayburn replied. "She says that she sent for me to tell me first about this, because she knew that I was acting for Angela in trying to obtain some facts about poor Wynstaye. She has given me her word of honour that she will not move further in the matter until I have investigated this marriage story. I am sorry to say it, Honor, but I am afraid that Maud was quite prepared, not only to believe everything against Wynstaye, but to take steps to have this same doubt put into Angela's mind."

"She would not find that an easy matter!" Honor

Bellares said ; and then she got up, and for almost the first time in their acquaintance she showed anger. " It is too horrible ! " she said. " What is Maud made of ! Does she really belong to us ! Are we the same flesh and blood ! Oh ! Rex." She turned round and stretched out both her hands. " For God's sake don't let her take this ridiculous and ugly story to the child ! "

He got up and clasped those two hands in his.

" She has promised me faithfully she will not move till I have thrashed this matter out."

" But how can you do this ? " asked Honor in a low voice.

" Oh ! there are many ways. First and foremost, I shall get in touch with this woman myself. As she is fairly well known on the stage, it should not be difficult to get into communication with her."

" You are always so comforting ! " said Honor. " I feel ashamed to make so many demands upon you. Sometimes everything seems just a little too much for me. To-day is one of my bad days. Please don't take any notice of me. I shall be myself again to-morrow."

" I wish you would give me a promise," Rayburn answered her. " Don't go to lunch with Maud. Make some excuse. Don't meet her till you are absolutely obliged to do so. Leave her to me."

She drew her hands away from his and walked back to the fire, then she said— '

" I am in a rather difficult position. Wait, I will give you a letter to read. Its from mother." As she went to her desk and found the letter and brought it back she smiled at him, but her lips were quivering. " When your sister Ellen was here having tea with me last week, she was deploring the fact that you were such a splendid friend ! "

" Why deplore that fact ? " he asked quickly.

" I think she meant," said Honor Bellares, " that you were sacrificing yourself unnecessarily. In fact she said quite frankly that you had all the cares and the troubles of a family man and none of the joys."

"Ellen is a dear soul," said Captain Rayburn; "but she doesn't understand certain things. She doesn't realize, for instance, one thing," he said, and a little note of passion crept into his voice, "that there can be nothing more wonderful or beautiful to me than the thought that I can be of some little service to you and yours." Then the truth broke from him. "Honor, I have tried so hard not to say it. I have even tried to hide it from your eyes—but it is getting too strong, too dominant with me. I am speaking of my love, my love for you. Oh! my dear, won't you let me take care of you? I ask for nothing more than that."

CHAPTER XXIV

HONOR BELLARES answered her mother's appeal that night by a tender little letter into which she slipped a cheque.

She besought her mother not to deny her the joy of helping in this way, and added that she preferred not to ask any favour of Maud. At the end of her letter she wrote—

"I shall see you in a day or two. I have some news for you—news which I prefer to give you myself and not to send in a letter."

At the same time she wrote a few lines to Angela and announced that she intended to pay a visit to Wycherley in the course of the following week.

"I am fulfilling my promise to Miss Fotherington. She pressed me so much to go down, if only for an hour or two."

Honor was busy working the next day when Captain Rayburn was announced.

As they were alone he drew her into his arms and held her there just as if she had been a child.

"Even now," he said to her, "I can't believe it. I can't realize that this is real, that you come to me of your own accord, that you are going to let me take care of you." They stood a moment in silence and then she looked up at him. With her pretty cropped hair and the colour in her cheeks and the light in her eyes, she was very lovely. "We must think about Angela," she said.

"I am going to see that woman this evening. It didn't take me very long to trace her. She is fortunately in town, acting at a music hall in Shepherd's Bush. A man I know, who is in touch with theatrical matters, helped me to find her whereabouts. He tells me she has the character of being a very good-hearted creature, plain spoken, and certainly not very refined, but what is known

as a real good sort! I'll get the truth out of her, and I'll come back to you after my interview."

And then they talked again of themselves, and their plans. He pleaded for an early marriage. "I've waited so long. You'll let me get all the arrangements hurried forward, won't you, dearest?"

When this point had been settled to his satisfaction, Rayburn spoke again about Maud.

"Promise me," he said, "that you won't go near her. I have rung through and told her that I shall see her probably this afternoon. I shall not go," he announced; "but that will keep her in, so she will not come here bothering you. As a matter of fact, I shan't see Maud till after I have interviewed this music-hall woman, and then I shall deal very straightforwardly with your sister and with Mrs. Bosworth."

Captain Rayburn made his way to the music-hall that evening, about half an hour before the advertised time for the arrival of Miss Winnie Wynstaye to appear.

He sent a little note through the stage door-keeper, begging her to see him, as he had a matter of some importance to discuss with her.

This note Miss Wynstaye found on her arrival. She was doing two turns a night and came on from another outlying music-hall. Captain Rayburn's request puzzled her.

She sent her dresser out to have a look at him, and the woman reported that he was a "swell" sort of chap, and that he was tall and very good looking.

"You go back and speak to him," ordered Miss Wynstaye. "You say that I can't ask him in here; but I'll be out in about half an hour's time. And look here, give him the tip to go round to the front of the house and see my show," she added.

Captain Rayburn obeyed this advice and bought a stall.

He admired Miss Wynstaye. He thought her a very handsome creature, and he saw that she had a good deal of rough talent. Although she did not appeal to him he quite understood why her sallies and songs should be so rapturously received.

He was round pacing to and fro at the stage-door entrance when she came out followed by her dresser.

This woman she sent on in front, telling her to go home as soon as she could, while she herself walked straight up to the tall soldierly figure who was smoking a cigarette and addressed him.

He flung the cigarette away and touched his cap as she spoke to him.

"Say, this is a queer sort of game. What do you want with me? I don't know you. Never heard your name before; never seen you neither. Have you—have you brought me bad news?" she asked all in the same breath.

"I hope not, Miss Wynstaye," Captain Rayburn answered. "I sent you a note to ask you to see me because I am very much interested in a little story which has reached me and which concerns you."

He thought she gave a little sigh of relief, then she shrugged her shoulders, and turning walked beside him slowly down the narrow passage.

"Oh! well, there's heaps of stories going the round about me, most of 'em lies," she said; "but that's all in the way of business. Anyway, I don't see what concern it is of yours what they say about me."

"Quite right, Miss Wynstaye, I have no business to interfere in anything that concerns you except where you may be connected with matters which concern friends of mine."

She gave him a sharp look.

It was a clear night. There was a moon; but the night air was chilly and she wore a large loose fur coat. She was decidedly handsome, but seen in this cold light she looked haggard and worn, and not so happy as a successful person might be supposed to look.

"Go on," she said. "Get it off your chest!"

"I understand that you have quite recently been acting in Falmouth, Miss Wynstaye."

"Well, since you know that, there isn't much use in denying it."

"One night some ladies were at the theatre. They were interested in you and had an interview with you."

She said " Yes " quite shortly, adding again, " What about 'em ? "

" This," answered Rayburn. " They have informed me that you declared to them that you are the wife of an officer in the Flying Corps, by name Derrick Wynstaye, a man who is reported missing from the Western Front."

" Oh ! they've said that, have they ? " observed Miss Winnie Wynstaye ; " and this is your interesting story ? Some story, sure ! " and then she laughed. " It strikes me they're the sort that wouldn't stick much at what they said if it was to serve their purpose ! I suppose you won't like that if they're friends of yours, but it's the way I feel, and I size people up pretty quick I can tell you. You've just got to in my profession, or you'd be ' had ' every second minute." She laughed again and then she looked at him with a frown.

" What's this got to do with you, anyway ? "

" I'll tell you if you will answer me a few questions."

She answered him roughly.

" I'm not out to be amiable."

They walked on in silence a pace or two ; then he said—

" I really do apologize for being such a nuisance. If the matter were not rather serious I assure you I would not trouble you," he said then.

" Oh ! that's all right," she remarked, evidently mollified by his manner ; in the same breath she asked : " Well, what is it you want to know ? "

" *Did* you tell these ladies you are Derrick Wynstaye's wife ? "

She stopped short and looked up at him and suddenly she laughed.

" It's a nice mix up, isn't it ? Of course, I got on to them the moment they came into the box ; at least I recognized one of 'em, a beastly stuck-up cat of a woman, and when I saw her looking at the programme and getting on to my name, I knew she was just ready to burst herself with curiosity. And I'll tell you straight it wasn't me as put it about that I belonged to that poor flying chap. It was done by the management. They thought it would be a

good ad. for me, so I let it go ; in fact, I never gave two thoughts about it till that night when those two society dames came nosing after me as eager as you please."

" And you told them you were Mrs. Derrick Wynstaye ? "

She turned on him hotly.

" Not me ! not on your life ! When they began asking me if he was my husband, I just fooled them. Oh, it's as easy as eating pie if you know how to go about it ! And I sent them away just busting with excitement and all in a nasty haste to go out and hurt somebody ! "

" It was a dangerous thing to do," Rayburn said gravely, " if, as I gather, you are not Mrs. Derrick Wynstaye."

" Well," she answered sullenly, " what does that matter to me. I don't belong to where they live ! "

Captain Rayburn paused before putting his next question.

" Would you mind explaining one point ? "

" That depends."

" I just want to know—and believe me I am not asking this from idle curiosity. Have you any right to the name of Wynstaye ? "

She gave him a sharp look, paused a brief while, and then said—

" No."

" But you know Derrick ? "

She laughed.

" Well, rather ! I've known him for years, and liked him too ! Derry's one of the best, he is ! "

Rayburn pondered her words, and then he remarked—

" But if you liked him, why did you give such a wrong impression to these ladies ? "

" Why ? I'll tell you ; because I'd a grudge against one of them ! She used to be called Lessingham, and she played a rotten game with poor Derry, as perhaps you know. I bluffed about being married to him because I thought I'd upset her, and I did, too ! She didn't like it one little bit, I can tell you, when I drew the long bow and began gassing about the way he'd cared for me. And it wasn't altogether a lie," she added, " for Derry did like me ; he was always

a pal of mine. He was one of the decentest and best chaps one could ever hope to meet," she said emphatically. "It used to rile me to see him making such a fool of himself over that creature, so when my chance came to get back on her a bit, I took it; what do you think?"

"It might have caused little Mrs. Wynstaye great distress, only fortunately I have been able up to the present to prevent her hearing about it."

Captain Rayburn heard her draw in her breath sharply.

"Of course, I ought to have thought about that, but I didn't." She stood still suddenly. "What a d——d fool I am! I see daylight now. It was to churn up the girl Derry married that the great Mrs. Bosworth came asking me questions. Well, it don't matter! There's no real harm done. And look here, if she should try any hanky-panky tricks about this, just you let me know."

Rayburn assured her that he did not now anticipate any action on Mrs. Bosworth's part.

"I think I have managed to stop any mischief, but, of course, until I had seen you——"

"You didn't believe anything against Derry, did you?" she asked him abruptly, and he answered—

"No;" adding, "Only the matter was repeated to me with such seriousness, I felt I must interview you."

"I see. You're a great friend of Derry's wife?"

"I am very fond of her." Captain Rayburn hesitated an instant and then said, "I am going to marry her sister. Angela Wynstaye has been very ill, but she is getting better by degrees."

"And she's frightfully miserable, of course?"

"Oddly enough," he answered, "Angela is not so unhappy as we all expected. She lives in the confident hope she will have good news some day, and that he may come back to her."

Miss Winnie Wynstaye's voice sounded very thick as she spoke—

"Poor kid! Seems cruel to let her go on supposing things that can't happen, don't it? But there, you never

know ! She may be right. Anyway, I'm sorry for her." She gave a big sigh, and then she stood still and hailed a cab that was passing. " I'm tired. I think I'll be gettin' home. I suppose I can't give you a lift ? "

" Thank you," Captain Rayburn said. " I shall be very glad if you will drop me somewhere on the way to Chelsea. Is that anyway in your direction ? "

" My way's yours," she answered. His courtesy and friendly manner evidently gratified her. She talked on almost amusingly as they drove swiftly towards Chelsea ; and yet she gave him a sense of pity. He felt that she was unhappy, and that she adopted this slangy, humorous manner to hide her real feelings. Though he could not approve of what she had done, he parted with her feeling that the character she had been given was a right one. She was a " real good sort." Her last words brought this fact home closely.

" Look here," she said, just before the cab moved on, " I'd like to do something for poor Derry's wife ; only just you let me know if there is anyway I can serve her. I'm not in her life, I know that, still I may be good for something ; one never knows. Cheerio ! " she added, and she waved her hand half gaily.

But she crouched back in the cab, and her eyes were wet as she was driven homewards, and she sat in this condition for some little while. Then suddenly she roused herself and, putting her head out of the cab window, she directed the man to drive her in another direction.

" I'm just about through with this ! " she said to herself almost fiercely.

When the cab stopped she found herself in a quiet street close to Piccadilly.

Miss Wynstaye got out and paused a moment on the pavement ; then with a shrug of her shoulders she rang the bell of the tall block of chambers.

When the door was opened to her she inquired for Major Fotherington.

" I suppose I can go up," she said.

The man said " Yes " at first, and then added dubiously :

"But I don't think you'll find the Major, miss. I believe he's gone."

"How do you mean—gone?" asked Miss Wynstaye.

"Gone back to the Front. That's what I mean," said the man.

The woman looked at him. "Gone out again . . . but he was knocked out. They wouldn't take him. . . ."

"Oh! he's gone all right. Made up 'is mind 'e'd do it and 'e did, and 'e ses to me, 'e ses, just as 'e was a-startin', 'Good-bye,' 'e ses, 'and good luck, and may yer be 'ere when I gets back, if I ever does get back,' 'e ses."

Winnie Wynstaye made no answer. She turned as though to leave the building, and then she walked back again.

"Well, I'm going up, all the same. I suppose his man's there."

"You can go up and see," said the porter; and then he went below again.

She mounted the stairs slowly. All the anger, all the fierceness which had incited her to take this action, had been swept away. She felt tired and miserable.

When she stood outside the door of Fotherington's chambers she rang the bell, and she rang it several times; but no one came; and at last she realized that there was no one there to answer the summons.

Shivering violently, she pulled her fur coat closer about her and went slowly down the stairs again. When she reached the bottom she called to the porter, and she slipped half a crown in his hand.

"Look here," she said. "Can you tell me what time Major Fotherington left?"

"He was away from 'ere before seven this morning," the man answered her; and he spoke now more respectfully. "I suppose you didn't find no one up there?"

She shook her head.

"Ah! I didn't think as you would. Major Fotherington's servant, 'e packed up everything and got away in pretty good time this afternoon. 'E ain't a soldier. E's too old."

The porter went out to the cab with Miss Wynstaye and opened the door for her.

She gave him a nod by way of thanks; and this time as she was driven away the actress sat with her two hands pressed against her heart and swayed to and fro as though in agony.

"It was beastly of him," she said to herself. "And he's treated me like a skunk! But oh! my God if he never comes back, what shall I do! What shall I do?"

CHAPTER XXXV

ANGELA made several ineffectual attempts to return to London during the next few weeks. Whenever she broached the question of her departure from Wycherley, however, Miss Fotherington hurriedly protested. It was not only that she had grown to care very tenderly for Angela ; but she had been quick to realize that the presence of this young creature had brought a strange solace to her father. He did nothing to discourage Angela's fervent hopes ; but Lucy Fotherington knew that he regarded Wynstaye as being lost.

Angela herself, though she advanced to physical strength very slowly, felt her faith take deeper roots during this spell of quiet existence at Wycherley. If she had ever been asked to define her outlook, she would have declared that she lived in reality strung up in the convincing sense of renewed happiness awaiting her.

With her it surely was a case of faith being the force of life. Her mind was at this time at its best and bravest. This belief in a reunion with her husband was not a passive thing, it was a faculty.

It winged her spirit, lifting her far above the bleakness of despair and the corroding power of sorrow ! And the basic condition of this faith lay in the conviction that if her husband had actually passed out of existence, he would have communicated with her in some way ; that some manifestation would have been vouchsafed her !

It was, of course, a theory which most people would have condemnedsharply, either as irreligious or hypersentimental.

But Angela did not trouble herself very much about what other people thought in this respect. She clung to that which was literally the mainspring of her own existence, and her faith was supported by intangible but none the less to her satisfying influences.

So it was that in those weeks at Wycherley she lived

almost cheerfully; insisting on helping Miss Fotherington in her numerous war activities, and creeping a little more surely each day into the heart of the old man under whose roof she lived.

Honor had paid her two flying visits. Angela approved of the early marriage for which Rayburn had pleaded; and she not only travelled up from Wycherley to be present at the wedding, but took out one of her pretty trousseau gowns to wear on this great occasion.

It was a very quiet wedding. Mrs. Fayne stole a couple of hours or so from her sick husband, and Captain Rayburn's family and a few of his colleagues from the War Office were present. Maud Fayne excused herself on the plea of not being well.

The happiness of Rayburn and Honor was a joy and an anguish combined to Angela; but she bore up magnificently. Her flat had been opened for two days, and after the little wedding luncheon Angela drove her mother to the station and then went back to her own home.

Her wonderful courage failed her just for a little while as she passed through the rooms of this loved and familiar place.

In her imagination she could see her husband moving about, hanging the pictures, smoking his pipe, and every now and then drawing her to him to be kissed and have her hair ruffled; and just for a spell the bleakness of that which was accepted by every one else fell upon her; the horror of a future without hope, without faith, without any clinging assurance that they would meet again, was so awful that she sat like a creature frozen, frightened she hardly knew of what!

The entrance of Mason bringing her some tea broke this painful spell; and with all the resolution of which she was capable, she thrust the phantom of doubt behind her.

"I must unpack those flowers the Wycherley gardener gave you," she said to her maid. "Bring them to me here. It's nice and warm in this room, and, Mason, when you bring the flowers and vases, let me have one of your aprons, please."

She was busy unpacking and arranging the flowers when the outer bell rang sharply. After a little pause Mason came into the room rather mysteriously.

"It's a lady, ma'am," she said. "She won't give me her name. She says as you don't know her, but she wants to see you; she says it's somethink particular."

Angela hesitated only an instant and then said—

"Let her come in."

She had removed her apron and was standing in front of the fire looking very thin but very pretty in the grey gown she had put on for Honor's wedding, as Mason returned and ushered in the visitor.

Angela saw before her a fine handsome woman, rather *voyante* in appearance. Although this woman was a stranger yet there was something curiously familiar about her.

Winnie Wynstaye paused, and then as the door was shut she came forward.

"Thank you for seeing me," she said. "It's very good of you. I don't know that I've any right to butt in on you in this way; but when one is in trouble one thinks of every way one can to help oneself."

"Won't you sit down?" asked Angela, a little nervously.

"Before I do that," said her strange guest, "perhaps I had better tell you who I am. I'm on the stage, and I'm called Winnie Wynstaye."

Angela smiled faintly.

"Oh! now I know why I seemed to recognize you. I saw your portrait in Miss Radford's room. Please do sit down."

"Thanks."

She sank rather heavily into a chair as she spoke, and she pushed up her veil; then Angela could see that despite the artificial additions to her complexion, she looked haggard, and there were dark stains round her eyes.

There was a little pause, and Angela, who had sat down near the fire, looked slightly uncomfortable, then she said gently—

"How can I——?" She paused. "What can I do for you?"

The other woman's answer was in the form of a question.

"You've been staying just lately at Wycherley, haven't you?"

Angela looked in startled fashion at her now.

"Yes; but——"

"Are you going back there soon?"

"I must return for a little while; but——"

Again the other woman stopped her.

"Oh! that helps me a lot." She glanced up at Angela and she laughed, though her face was contracted, and her lips quivered. "Don't get the notion that I'm a crazy busybody. I'm only a very unhappy woman." She pushed her hair back from her brow; her eyes were dry, but she had evidently wept recently and bitterly. "I'll tell you why I'm asking these questions; why I've come to you. There's something Sir Gerald's got to know; it's bound to hurt him however he hears it; but, somehow, if it could come through you——"

Angela looked troubled. The unexpected appearance of this woman had excited her, and the introduction of Sir Gerald's name made the position even more strange.

"You want me to speak to Sir Gerald?"

"Yes; he's got to be told that I'm his son Hugo's wife; it can't be kept away from him any longer."

Angela looked at the speaker half doubtfully.

"You are married to Major Fotherington. I did not know he was married."

"No, of course you didn't. He wasn't likely to tell you, but I'm his wife safe enough. I wanted Sir Gerald to know from the start, but Hugo he raised the devil if I so much as whispered it."

"But"—Angela paused—"surely there must be somebody——" Again she paused; then she said, "I—I am almost a stranger to Sir Gerald."

"You're Derry's wife, and you're the proper person to do this, and in two twos I'll tell you why."

She threw back her heavy coat, and pushed the hair from her brow with that same nervous gesture.

"Sir Gerald was very good to me when I was a kid;

my mother used to be his wife's maid, and he took her on as his housekeeper when he heard she was down to bedrock, and let her keep me at Wycherley. I know now I did a pretty skunky trick when I turned my back on mother and went on the stage. It was Hugo who helped me to do a scoot, but another fellow got the blame: that fellow was your husband."

Angela said "Oh!" and shrank back visibly from the other woman, who speaking wearily, went on with her story—

"It was Hugo's game to let his father think Derry was a rotten bad lot, and so as everything should match up as it were, he made me take the name of Wynstaye for the stage."

"It was an abominable thing to do," Angela said. "A most cruel and wicked thing!"

"You're right—it *was* wicked, but Hugo always was a bit cruel, and he generally managed to slide out of things and let other people suffer. I was to blame too; but good God, what do you expect from an ignorant fool of a girl? Hugo had got me body and soul, he was the only man in the world for me, and even now, though he treated me something cruel, I tell you I'd go through fire and water just to know I'd see him again!"

Angela was trembling; there was an abandonment of passion, a suggestion of devastating grief, about this woman which affected her sharply.

"What do you mean? Why should you not see him again?"

The actress suddenly threw out her arms, and in a hoarse broken voice she said—

"Because he's gone; he's down and out. It's in the papers to-night, and oh! it fair tears my heart. Though he tired of me, and hated the sight of me, he belonged to me and I loved him—he never knew how much I loved him!"

She was not crying, but rocking herself to and fro. Derrick Wynstaye's wife got up and put her hand tenderly on the other woman's shoulder, and her eyes were blinded with a rush of tears.

Suddenly Hugo Fotherington's wife took Angela's hand from her shoulder and pressed it tightly in both of hers.

"You see now why I came. I want you to tell Sir Gerald that I'm never going to boost myself forward or ask for anything. I just want him to know that though I'm on the halls, I've been so proud of the old name; and I've stood by Hugo even though he's done things which a man like him ought never to have done. And now he is gone, and there's no chance for him to put the wrong right."

Suddenly she changed her tone; the hoarse note went out of her voice. "But he died game!" she said. "Oh! he was brave enough, was Hugo! They say in the papers to-night he gave his life to save four or five others, and him practically unfit to be out there at all! I'd like to know that his father would take that to mean that this sort of death squares everything, even what he did to me and to poor Derry. I've got a longing to let Sir Gerald know about me. Will you do this?"

She looked upward as she spoke, and Angela bent over her and kissed her.

"Yes, I shall go to Wycherley to-morrow. I will give him your message, and I will then write to you or see you."

"And you can tell him from me that your husband was always straight as a die. I'm pretty sure Derry guessed why I took his name, but he never gave Hugo away. He was a white man, and whenever I say a prayer, which isn't very often I'm afraid, I always ask that he shall be sent back to you."

"Oh!" said Angela; and now the tears were rolling down her cheeks. "Say that prayer very, very often." Almost in the same breath she said: "That—that sounds very selfish! Why should you ask for my husband to come back when so many other women have lost theirs? I must be patient. It is all in God's hands."

As her guest rose to go Angela pressed her to remain.

"Won't you have something to eat? Won't you stay here a little while?"

But Winnie shook her head.

" No ; I'd like to, but I can't," she said. " I'm going right on now to sing at a hospital. I'm very late, but maybe I'll be in time to put in a song and do something for the boys. I'm a great favourite with the poor fellows in hospital," she added. " They tell me I've got just the right way with them. Well, you see, I'm one of their own sort, and I understand how to treat 'em."

Angela looked at her in astonishment.

" But," she said, " *can* you sing ? You are brave ! "

" It's doing this that's going to keep me alive ! " the other woman answered almost fiercely. " Why, do you think I could go back now and sit in a room ? Thank God ! I've got my work to-night. I don't mind how many times I sing, or how much I do to make the boys laugh and be merry ; anything to keep me from remembering ! "

She was pulling on her gloves and fastening her coat.

" You've been good to me," she said in her abrupt way, " and you can bet your bottom dollar I shan't forget it. You might have turned me away without a word, but I took your measure. Where do you think I saw you ? Why in church to-day when your sister was married. It was what I saw in your face settled me to come to you now. But just look at that time. My ! I guess that taxi of mine will have to scuttle some ! "

She gave Angela's hand an almost painful grip, and a moment later had hurried out into the hall and disappeared down the lift. Angela walked back into the flat feeling dazed and yet a little excited. Calling to Mason, she told the girl to finish setting the flowers, and at that moment the telephone bell rang.

It was her sister Maud's voice inquiring if Mrs. Derrick Wynstaye was at the flat.

" Yes, I'm here, Maud," Angela answered.

Miss Fayne said, " Oh ! " and then she added, " I want to see you. Can you come now ? I'm shut up in the house, you know, with a bad cold."

" I'll be with you in half an hour," Angela answered.

She was glad of the excuse to go out. The visit of Winnie Wynstaye had left her greatly disturbed ; she felt herself

shaking with a curious sense of nervous excitement, and yet paradoxically she felt stimulated by the warm if crude humanity of the woman.

The fact of Hugo Fotherington's death was so terrible it overshadowed the other information. Angela grieved in anticipation of the blow and fresh sorrow that would come to the old man at Wycherley, for whom she had now a very warm and sincere affection. Even though she was a little nervous of meeting Maud, it was helpful to feel that there was something she had to do. Possibly it might do her good to have an argument with her sister. Angela had a longing to slip back, if only for a brief spell into old feelings and old surroundings. Her nerves were raw this night from the prolonged tension.

Maud Fayne had established herself now in a house.

As she drove along now, Angela wondered why her sister had sent for her ; she hoped it was not to listen to anything disagreeable. Knowing what she knew, Angela prepared herself for some bitter words about Honor and her second marriage.

The house Maud had taken was a handsome one; and evidently she had changed in her taste. The rather flamboyant futuristic decorations which for a time she had affected had gone and given place to an establishment of quite a different order.

Miss Fayne was alone when Mrs. Wynstaye was announced.

She was sitting at a writing-table, but got up, and as Angela came hurriedly towards her, the elder sister's heart contracted.

They had not met for a very long time, and Maud was shocked to see how fragile Angela had become ; how sorrow and suspense had changed her.

She was no longer a dainty and mischievous girl ; she was a woman, young of course, but a woman who had looked into the very heart of trouble, and whose faith and love and youth were being tortured hourly.

" I'm sorry I brought you out. It's raining, isn't it ? I hope you won't feel any the worse for coming," Maud said.

"Oh! I'm quite well now," Angela answered. "I'm—I'm not very fat, I know, but I'm really strong again, and I want to take on my hospital work as soon as I possibly can; but I have to go back to Wycherley for a little while."

"Take off your coat and sit down," said Maud. "I suppose you were at the wedding?" she added as she glanced at Angela's frock.

"Yes; I was there. Honor looked very sweet. They went away from her studio; you know we had our luncheon there."

Maud smiled rather bitterly.

"Well, after all you were right. I suppose I was very dense, but I never imagined he cared two pins about Honor. But you evidently thought differently."

"Oh! I saw it coming a long time ago," Angela answered.

She spoke very gently.

Maud's manner was an agreeable disappointment. Perhaps her sympathy was too responsive these times, but she seemed to feel a note of pathos about this rich and lonely young woman. Of course it was Maud's fault that she was lonely; she need not have cut herself adrift from all those who belonged to her; still she was not the only one who had made mistakes.

"I didn't send for you to talk about the wedding," Miss Fayne remarked. "I had an idea that you would be in London, and I wanted to see you." She paused awhile and frowned, and then she said abruptly, "I don't know if you have heard about a very stupid mistake which Patricia Bosworth and I made a few weeks ago. I thought I'd like to tell you that I'm sorry for my share in that mistake."

Angela had bent over a large bowl of flowers. But now she looked at her sister.

"I—I heard nothing," she said. "I don't want to hear anything, Maud dear, unless you particularly wish to tell me."

"I think I would rather speak about it myself," Miss Fayne answered, "as it is just probable that it may get round to your ears in time."

She then gave the story of what had happened at the Falmouth theatre.

Some colour rushed into Angela's delicate cheeks as she listened, and then she said—

"It was a very natural mistake, at least to any one who does not know Derry, otherwise——"

Maud Fayne laughed in her usual cold way.

"Well, I suppose Patricia might be supposed to know him as well as anybody."

"I deny that," Angela answered. "Mrs. Bosworth knew Derry only in one phase. She misunderstood him and wilfully chose to misunderstand him from the moment that she enforced a separation. But let that pass; I want you to realize, Maud dear, that—that I think it awfully sporting of you to tell me this yourself. I appreciate the thought. I am perfectly convinced you did believe the story, otherwise you would not have moved in the matter."

It was not often that Maud changed colour, but she did it thoroughly now.

"Well, my dear," she said. "I'm not a saint. And you mustn't suppose I am; but it seemed to me that there might be something in it, and—and, well! after all you *are* my sister, and I wanted to stand by you. I should have told you this some time ago, as soon as I did find out that we had made a stupid mistake, but you were not in London, and I preferred to wait until we could meet; and then there is something else."

She paused and Angela caught a change in her voice; immediately her heart began to beat very quickly. She gripped her two hands together.

"Oh! you know something—you——" She broke off, then she said eagerly, passionately: "Please, please tell me what you know."

CHAPTER XXXVI

IT was the old Maud who answered.

"Don't get hysterical, Angela," she said sharply. "I know nothing, I have no news to give you. I only want to speak to you about a matter which concerns myself and you."

All the colour brought by excitement faded out of Angela's cheeks.

She sat down suddenly and pressed her trembling hands to her eyes, and to relieve the painful feelings which came upon her at sight of her sister's distress, Maud went on in the same tone—

"Of course I know you are over anxious and nervous, but if you intend to get really strong and well again, Angela, you will have to take a good pull at yourself."

Angela's hands dropped from her face and she laughed a sad, weary little laugh.

"Sometimes I don't care if I don't ever get well again!" she said. Then she looked up at her sister with something of her old spirit. "I'm not going to faint. Don't be scared. Let me hear what you want to tell me."

"I've got a proposition to make to you, Angela. Why shouldn't you come here and live with me? This house is too big for one person, and I suppose you are not going to settle for life with the Fotheringtons. Of course I don't expect you to decide right away," Miss Fayne added quickly. "You'll have to think things over; but I want you to know that I shall be very glad to have you. Because we haven't pulled together very well all this time, it doesn't mean to say that we shouldn't; things aren't at all what they were."

She spoke a little brusquely; but Angela understood her.

"Thank you, Maud dear," she said. "I think it's most awfully good of you, and I appreciate your thought very

much. I'll have to think it over and let you know a little later on."

Her lips trembled just slightly as she added : " I don't mind confessing I did want to keep on the flat if I could."

" Well, it strikes me," said Maud, " that it might be the solution of a rather difficult problem for you, because I don't suppose that you will have very much money. I don't exactly know what arrangements your husband made for you, or whether he had any money to leave you. Of course you will get a pension."

Angela got up again very quickly.

" Money means nothing to me," she said passionately, " nothing ; don't let's talk about it."

" All right," said Maud ; and she talked instead about her own affairs. Then she invited Angela to make a tour with her round the house.

When they came back to the drawing-room Miss Fayne fidgeted about for a little while and then said abruptly : " Perhaps I'd better tell you that if you do decide to come to me you will not be likely to run up against Patricia Bosworth. We're not seeing anything of one another now. Taking the house together was a great mistake ; Patricia is so capricious. She soon got tired of me. If you don't come to live with me, Angela, I believe I'll turn this place into a convalescent home for officers. One's got to do something, you know."

Angela felt very weary when at last she left her sister and drove back to her flat.

It had been a day of excitement and nervous agitation.

Her thoughts winged themselves to Wycherley as she drove through the wet streets.

She knew from Lucy Fotherington that Sir Gerald and his elder son had been estranged, that something of a dark and an unhappy nature had separated them more surely just recently. Sir Gerald's state was only typical of so many, many other fathers who had given all they held dearest for the service of their country and their king ; but Angela felt intuitively that Hugo Fotherington's death

would signify a specially heavy grief to his father, and she pitied him with all her heart.

She slept that night simply from exhaustion ; and when the morning came Mason urged her to remain in bed.

" You really ought to rest, ma'am," she said. " You look dreadfully white and done up this morning."

" I'll stay here for a little while," Angela answered ; " then you must pack my bag, Mason ; we are going back to Wycherley this afternoon."

But when the afternoon came Angela was not well enough to take the journey, and as it happened just about the time she would have started she received a telegram from Lucy Fotherington informing her that Sir Gerald had left for London, and that he intended to call at the flat some time that evening.

He came about seven o'clock. He carried himself as proudly as ever, and he was full of anxious inquiry about Angela. But as he sat down in Derry's favourite chair, he looked so old, so worn, so stricken, that it was with difficulty that Angela kept back her tears.

" You are going to stay and have some dinner with me," she pleaded ; but he shook his head.

" I have to see an old friend ; he has promised to bring me such information as they have at the War Office. The papers have been very good to Hugo," Sir Gerald said ; " it seems to have been a gallant death." He lapsed into silence for a little while ; then he said in a low voice, " I didn't think that Hugo would go so soon ; there were things that had to be said between us ; wrongs on both sides that should have been set right : in particular, Angela my dear, there was one wrong which affected your husband, and which injured him for a time at least very severely ! "

Angela took her courage in both her hands.

" Sir Gerald," she said, " I have something to tell you. I gave a promise only yesterday." Sitting down opposite to him she spoke of Winnie Fotherington's visit, and was beginning to carry through the task she had undertaken, when Sir Gerald stopped her.

" Thank you, my dear," he said ; " it is very good of you,

but I know all you are going to tell me. I had a letter from my son Hugo, sent from France about five days ago. It only reached me this morning. In this letter," said the old man, " he tells me of his marriage ; he exonerates Derrick from any association with the girl whom he made his wife ; he further exonerates Derrick from all connexion with a contemptible act, an act of forgery. I think," said Sir Gerald Fotherington, " he never hoped to come out of this war alive, or maybe this letter would never have been written. After all," he added very bitterly, " to die is easier than to live in certain circumstances ! Hugo has gone ; but he has left me a heavy burden ! " Then he turned to Angela. " You wanted to speak to me about his wife ? "

" Yes, if you will listen to me."

With a little tremble in her pretty voice, Angela repeated to him almost word for word what Hugo Fotherington's wife had said to her the day before.

" I must see her," said Sir Gerald, after a long pause. " I must charge myself with looking after her. There is much I must do. If Derrick had been here I would have asked his pardon for my son's criminal selfishness. In his absence, my dear, it is to you, as his wife, I offer my apology and ask your forgiveness."

" Please don't," said Angela brokenly.

But the old man persisted.

" I had been drawn very near to Derrick at the time of your marriage, for I must tell you, my dear, that in the years that have elapsed since Winnie Warren ran away many things occurred to convince me that whoever was to blame for her headstrong folly, that person was not the man who was originally blamed. So when Derrick wrote to me at the time of your marriage, I was only too pleased to stretch out the hand of friendship to you both. But almost immediately, my good feeling was checked and checked violently : it is unnecessary to go into details ; I will only tell you that a certain financial transaction (in which my name had been wrongfully used) was brought to my knowledge, and it seemed to me that I had convincing proof that your husband had been guilty, not merely of

a dishonourable action, but of a crime! In my just anger," Sir Gerald said slowly, "I wrote to Derrick; his answer convinced me that he had been shamefully used, and this letter"—he tapped the one he held in his hand—"formally acquits Derrick of any complicity with this miserable business; and that is why, my dear"—he got up as he spoke, and he held out his hand—"I ask you, as Derrick's wife, to forgive me and, if possible, to forgive my son!"

Angela took the hand in both of hers and she lifted it to her lips, with great difficulty restraining her tears. She went out with him into the little hall, and insisted on helping him to put on his heavy coat. Sir Gerald kissed her and held her in his arms in silence for a second or two, then he went away.

After he had gone, Angela sent a pencilled note to Hugo Fotherington's widow.

"Come and see me to-morrow. I have much to tell you."

CHAPTER XXXVII

DURING the next few days Angela changed her plans. She settled to remain in London, promising, however, to go to Wycherley in the beginning of the New Year.

"I must be with mummy on Christmas Day," she wrote to Lucy Fotherington; "Honor and Rex will be there; and my little nephew is going to have his first Christmas tree."

She had intended taking up her hospital work again; but Miss Radford supported Honor Rayburn in her strenuous opposition to this; and what they expressed gently, Winnie Fotherington put into very forcible language.

"Why, you must be stark, staring mad to talk about doing that pantry work! As if there wasn't heaps of other things you could do! What about knitting? Now I'm no earthly good with anything to do with a needle; but you——"

"I won't knit," said Angela, with a flash of her old rebellious spirit. "I don't want to sit still," she added.

The other nodded her head.

"I know just how you feel. Well, why not come along with me sometimes? They tell me you sing like a bird! Why don't you give some of your high notes to the charity concerts?"

But Angela shrank from this.

"I couldn't sing before a lot of people," she said.

"Well, what's the matter with your singing to a few?"

Sir Gerald Fotherington had had one interview with his son's widow. It had been a terrible ordeal for Winnie, and yet the old man had been very kind to her. He uttered no reproach, made no restrictions, laid down no laws. He had merely informed her that a certain income would be paid to her, and that Wycherley was open to her if and when she chose to go there.

" He didn't once speak about my work," she told Angela ; " but I've written to him and told him that when I'm through with my present contracts (and I can't chuck them without putting a lot of people in the cart), I'm going to leave the halls, and I'm going to train as a nurse. And see here, I want you and all Hugo's people to know that as I've got plenty to live on now, I'm going to give all the money that I earn to help some of these poor devils who have been knocked out in the war."

When she had gone away from London Angela confessed to her sister Honor that she missed Winnie very much.

" I know she's rough, and vulgar, and speaks badly," she said on one occasion, " but I like her. She's got such a splendid heart ! And I'm awfully sorry for her. But I shan't let her meet Maud again if I can help it," Angela added with a little laugh. " I really was rather frightened, lest they would come to blows ; and yet," Angela added, " Maud isn't nearly so difficult as she used to be, is she ? I'm awfully glad she is going to do something with that big house."

They were in the studio and Angela was roaming about, pulling out various canvasses and passing remarks on them.

When she came upon a large one and twisted it round, she caught her breath sharply.

It was the portrait of Richard Bosworth which Honor had commenced in the summer.

" Oh ! it gives me a pang to look at him ! " Angela said in a low voice, " Honor, I wonder if you will ever finish it ? "

" Oh ! I hope so. He wrote to me quite cheerfully a few days ago, Angela."

" He's one of those who will die cheerily. I'm so fond of him," Angela added.

" Mrs. Bosworth paid me a visit yesterday," Honor remarked. " She brought a friend, a nice American girl. I'm going to paint her."

" That's good," said Angela brightly.

" And Miss Storrington has written to me. She and her

brother are very anxious to have a portrait of their mother ; and they want to know if I will undertake the commission. If I do so, I fancy I should have to go to Peniston for the sittings. There's a message for you in the letter," Honor added. " Miss Storrington begs me to urge you to stay with them for a time."

Angela turned away very quickly.

" Oh ! I couldn't. I couldn't."

When she got back to her flat later, Mason told her that Mrs. Hugo Fotherington had rung up, adding : " She wants to see you very particular so she said, ma'am, and she said she'd call on chance."

Indeed at that moment the bell rang and Winnie appeared.

In her black garb with the long black veil depending from her small hat she looked altogether quieter ; but Angela found her face haggard, and her eyes very tired.

" I didn't know you were in town. When did you get back ? " she queried.

Winnie took her into her arms and kissed her heartily.

" I got in late last night. I had a lot to see to this morning, and then I had to go to a concert at a hospital out Hampstead way. It was rather a big affair, and I'd promised to sing a long time ago, so I felt I couldn't disappoint them."

" Winnie, I think you are doing far too much," Angela said.

" Oh ! I'm all right ; had a bit of a cold—but it don't amount to much ; let me look at you ! Why, you sweet little shadow, I am almost afraid to touch you ! You look as if you'd fade away. I met Vera Radford this morning in the bus, and she told me you'd been doing V.A.D. work again. I call it downright wicked of you."

" One must do something," Angela answered half passionately.

" Well, look here, I've got a plan. You don't care to sing to a crowd, but there's nothing against your having a few of the boys here now and again, giving them tea, and a song or two, is there ? "

" I should love it," Angela said ; and her face lit up.

"But it's so small here, and they want to be amused. I'm not a bit amusing!"

"Well, I am, and I'll help you; and I know a man who'll help too; he's the right sort, plays on the penny whistle and can do conjuring tricks. He isn't exactly your class, my dear, but bless you, the boys simply love him! What do you say to making a start to-morrow? There's a few chaps up at that place in Hampstead that I'd like to bring here; one of them's been knocked about something cruel: he's getting over his wounds; but he can't speak: seems as helpless as a baby."

"Oh! how dreadful," said Angela."

The day was very raw and cold; and as she had felt chilly, Mason had brought her a white fleecy sports coat. It gave her a very youthful air, and threw up the delicacy of her skin and the wonder of her beautiful hair!

Winnie Fotherington was looking at her with a very tender expression in her eyes.

"If you don't feel up to having these men," she said, "say so straight out."

"But I should love it, Winnie. You don't know how I long to do something however small: one feels so selfish thinking always about oneself."

"Well, I've got to rush now," said Mrs. Fotherington. "But I'll come in and see you later after dinner, and then we can fix up everything. I know I can get these men, because I spoke to matron this afternoon, and I told her I was going to ask you to have them here."

When she was alone Angela went to her little music cupboard and brought out all her songs; then she sat down, resolved to have an hour's practice.

Her voice was very wavering when she first began, and more than once she had to stop and pull her courage together; but in a little while the healing sweetness, the emotional joy which music always brought to her, took possession of her spirit, and the tears in her eyes and in her heart only added more beauty to her voice.

When Mason came in to announce that the modest supper was ready her face was beaming.

"It is lovely to hear you singing again, ma'am, only I do wish Mrs. Carter could be here. She did use to love that song as you was just singing."

After her supper Angela went back to the piano, and she was still playing and singing when Winnie Fotherington came back for her second visit.

"Don't stop," she commanded. "I know you don't mind if I smoke."

When Angela came to the end of her song the other woman applauded.

"My! you can sing some, and no mistake! and what a darling voice! See he re, my dear, you've got to make use of that voice. I tell you what I've been thinking," she added, "let's ask your sister Mrs. Rayburn to come to-morrow, and Vera Radford. I'm going to send in some contributions to the feast. They do enjoy their teas, these poor chaps!"

"Are they very crippled?" Angela asked.

"Oh! they can get about. One of them's had his leg taken off; but the fellow I'm most interested in is the one I was speaking about this afternoon. He's a bit of a mystery, so matron told me; seems he's been in hospital for the last six weeks or more, and there's nobody to claim him."

"That's very strange, isn't it?" Angela asked.

"Yes, it's queer," answered the other; "but, bless you, there are heaps of cases like his. When he was first brought over he was supposed to belong to a certain regiment; in fact, so matron told me to-day, he'd been listed as killed, and his people were informed; and then when they brought him over, they sent the news to a poor old mother and sister who live in Lancashire, and they brought them down from the north only to find that a mistake had been made. He didn't belong to them: they'd never seen him before."

"But *can* such mistakes be made?" asked Angela in a tremulous voice. "I thought every man had some mark by which he could be identified."

"Well, this chap had none. His identification disc was gone; and the report came through from the base hospital

that the only clue on which they had to go was a number written in ink inside the private's coat he was wearing when he was picked up. Poor chap ! I tell you I was sorry for him to-day. It's not only that he can't speak ; seems to me that he has been knocked right out altogether. Though I've been to this hospital lots of times," Winnie Fotherington added, " I never saw him before this afternoon. Matron told me they hadn't brought him down to any of the concerts, because they didn't think as it would be good for him ; but to-day some specialist had been visiting, and he advised them to bring this fellow down with the rest. So there he was sitting bang in front. But bless you ! the singing didn't seem to make a scrap of impression on him ! All the other men were laughing and applauding and making a great noise, but he never so much as moved ; he just sat there staring in front of him, looking for all the world like a lost soul ! "

" Do you think he ought to come here to-morrow ? "

" Yes, I do," said Winnie ; and she said it half defiantly. She was smoking, and speaking in a nervous and yet a restrained manner ; and her eyes were shining and the haggard look had dropped from her face considerably.

She talked on for a long time about the work she had been doing in hospitals, and about the many strange experiences which had been told her.

" Talk about books ! " she said. " I tell you, to go round one single ward would be to know things that you wouldn't learn in hundreds of books. I've been taught my lesson." She laughed a little bitterly. " I used to think myself something very fine and large ; and I don't really amount to that ! " she snapped her fingers. Then she got up and flung away the end of her cigarette. " Now go to bed," she said, " and sleep. I'll be round here in the morning and we'll plan everything out. I don't think I'll ask more than four men, that's quite enough in this small place."

She stood and looked about her with her hands on her hips.

" I want a bit of space, you know," she said. " I gener-

ally do a little dance for them. You've never seen me do my tricks. You're in for a fair treat, my dear!"

She kissed Angela, not once, but many times; and then she slipped into her big fur coat and went away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

HONOR was in her studio the next morning preparing for the coming of her new sitter, when her maid informed her that Mrs. Fotherington wished to speak to her.

With a little flutter at her heart, Honor went to greet her early visitor.

"I guess you weren't looking for any one to drop in on you so soon in the day," said Winnie; "and it's very good of you to see me; but I've come about something to do with Angela. Has she told you what she means to do this afternoon?"

"Yes, she rang us up last night," said Honor, "and I promised to go round and help. Both my husband and I are very glad that the child should occupy her mind. Won't you sit down, Mrs. Fotherington?"

But Winnie shook her head.

"No, I can't stop; but I thought I must just come. It's like this: I wanted you to put everything else on one side, just so as to be there to-day. I—I'm not often rattled, but I feel just fairly sick with nerves."

She looked about her and exclaimed at the brightness and the charm of the studio.

"I don't know a single thing about painting," she said; "but I do like this place."

She walked to and fro; and something in her manner stirred a little excitement in Honor.

Suddenly Winnie stood still and looked at her.

"I know," she said, "I know perfectly well. You're saying to yourself, 'This woman hasn't come to see me this morning just to talk about a tea-party this afternoon'; and you've hit it first go! I've come because I wanted to make sure you'd be with your sister to-day because ——" she broke off. "Please God I'm doing the right thing!" she said then. And then half fiercely, "Can't

you guess? Well, there's a man at that hospital who is going to be taken to Angela's flat this afternoon, and the man is Derry——"

Honor put her hands suddenly up to her lips and swayed a little uncertainly as she stood.

She looked so like Angela in that moment that she brought a rush of tears to the other woman's eyes.

"Yes, it's Derry sure enough! I recognized him at once. I don't know how somebody else hasn't tumbled to it before this, because he's been seen by so many people. And to think as I've gone to that hospital at least half a dozen times since the summer, and he's been there pretty nearly all the time!——"

The colour crept back to Honor's cheeks; she put out her hand almost imploringly.

"You are sure," she said. "There's mustn't be any mistake!"

"Do you suppose I don't know that!" the other woman answered. "I tell you it's Derry. Not the Derry like he used to be, but himself all the same."

Angela's sister covered her eyes for a second, and then she looked up.

"Is he—disfigured?"

"Oh! he's changed," Winnie said. "He's horribly changed. He is semi-paralysed, and was injured in many places, though his face escaped. But it's the expression which is so awful. He looks like a man who's seen death. If ever he talks again, you may take your oath he'll have some strange story to tell! Though I recognized him, I tell you honest, I couldn't make up my mind right away whether I'd make a move to bring them together. And then I felt I'd got to do it, and do it quickly."

Honor said nothing for the moment. She moved towards the fire and stood there looking into it, and then she turned round.

"Can you wait a few minutes? I must speak to my husband about this. If your theory is correct, and this man is indeed Derry, we shall want my husband to be with us to-day."

As she sat down to the telephone, the door opened and her nurse came in carrying little Chris.

The expression on Winnie Fotherington's face as she looked on the beautiful little child, was almost pitiful ; and her delight when the baby kissed her with his soft little lips passed all description.

" My ! " she said. " Isn't he a daisy ? What a love ! Isn't he the sweetest thing ? I'm simply mad about children : there isn't any fool thing I wouldn't do for a child like that."

She walked up and down with little Chris in her arms and parted with him reluctantly when his mother came towards her.

" My husband has asked me to beg you to go to him as soon as you can, Mrs. Fotherington. He is much excited about what you have told me, and before putting the matter through to the proper quarter, he feels he must see you."

" I'll go right along now," said Winnie. " I've got a cab waiting. It was very good of you to receive me so early."

" I hope you will come again many times," Honor said ; " and I can't thank you," she added. " I feel too deeply —there are some things, you know, which can never be properly expressed."

Captain Rayburn managed to get back to the studio in the early part of the afternoon.

" I've got the rest of the day off," he said to his wife, " and I'll take you to the flat. The child will need us both."

They talked the matter over for a long time, and Honor cultivated all the calmness possible.

They were the first to arrive at the tea party and found Angela much excited.

The usual box of flowers had arrived from Wycherley, and Mrs. Hugo Fotherington had sent in enough food for a tea party of twenty.

" Unless they eat it all up," Angela said, " Mason and I will have to live on cakes for the rest of the week. Come

and look at my arrangements, Honor. I've taken a good deal of the furniture out of the drawing-room and put it in my bedroom, but I've left the little smoking-room untouched. I thought perhaps one or another of the men might like to sit there——"

"What are you going to sing to them?" asked Honor.

Angela went through her programme. She had been quite delighted to welcome her brother-in-law, although she expressed surprise at seeing him.

"I never thought of asking you," she declared, "because I was afraid you couldn't get off duty; but I'm awfully pleased you're here, Rex, because a man is always so useful on an occasion like this."

When the husband and wife were alone for a little while, Honor slipped her hand into his.

"Rex," she said, with a break in her voice, "I'm almost frightened. Winnie was very determined, but yet suppose she has made a mistake?"

"In that case no harm will be done," Rayburn answered her, "for Angela knows nothing."

"But if there is not a mistake," urged Honor, "won't it be too much for her?"

"You mean you would like me to say something to her? To prepare her? I think, my dearest, we had better wait. These things have a way of dropping into place simply and naturally. At any rate we are here, and that is a great thing."

Miss Radford was the next to arrive, and then came Winnie Fotherington. When she took off her big fur coat she was dressed in one of her theatrical costumes.

"The boys wouldn't care to see me standing up like a crow, all in black," she said. "They like something to look at."

In her gipsy dress she was so strikingly handsome that Honor admired her audibly.

"Oh! I must paint you," she said. "I should make a beautiful picture of you."

Winnie laughed.

" The trouble is that I can never keep still for two minutes."

As Angela came into the room she advanced and took the girl into her arms.

" Here you are, sweetheart," she said, " and looking like a snowdrop. My ! you've made this place look a little bit of all right ! "

" Is it just as you want it ? " Angela asked eagerly.

" Just," said Winnie. " I see you're looking for my whistling pal. Well, my dear, to tell you the truth, I left him on the mat. I'll bring him in when the boys arrive, but he'd feel mighty uncomfortable in here with all your toffs."

She talked on gaily for another few minutes, and then when the bell rang she bustled Angela out of the room.

" I'm going to put them all in their places," she said, " and you're not to be seen till the proper moment. So stay in your bedroom till you're called."

As Angela, with a little laugh, obeyed her, and disappeared, Winnie turned to Captain Rayburn.

" I want to put him into that little room where she tells me he used to sit and write his letters and smoke. I'm not afraid of his breaking down ; it's her I'm thinking of. Besides, we've got to give the other chaps their little show ; and if she gets upset right away, why, it will make them feel uncomfortable."

The next moment she was heard receiving and welcoming the men as they emerged from the lift.

She seemed to know just the right sort of way to greet them and to put them at their ease.

There were two on crutches ; one with his head bound up and his arm in splints ; and a fourth man, who wore a green shade over his eyes, and who walked or rather shuffled along with the greatest difficulty.

The man with his arm injured, gave Miss Wynstaye a helping hand to get this comrade into the flat, but almost immediately Captain Rayburn came forward and took his place. Together he and Winnie piloted their charge into the little study which Angela herself (when she was in the flat)

always dusted and arranged. They put him in the arm-chair, and then Winnie Fotherington gently removed the shade from his eyes. As he looked down on the face of the man sitting in the chair, Rex Rayburn felt his heart leap, even though he shivered.

Though the face was so thin and worn, the expression utterly blank, the eyes fixed and staring, it was indubitably Derrick Wynstaye's body which had been brought home.

"I'll leave him with you for a minute or two," Winnie said. "We've got to give them a song or two and then they can have their tea."

As the music began and Angela's beautiful voice was heard clearly in every corner of the little flat, Captain Rayburn, sitting close beside that curiously inert figure, watched the face with breathless and painful intensity.

But Angela's song was sung to an end, and there came not a flicker in those staring eyes, nor a movement from those dry, almost sullen lips, and the realization of what this reunion must mean to the young wife (whose spirit had been so magnificent, and whose fighting determination not to let that faith be crushed or broken had been so wonderful) struck Rayburn as being one of the most terrible ordeals that could be imagined even in a time when life presented sorrow and suffering in such manifold forms.

After awhile he went away and closed the door on that silent figure.

Miss Winnie Wynstaye had sung her gipsy song, and the man with the penny whistle was delighting his audience.

After he had given an encore, a move was made to the dining-room for tea; and then it was that Angela for the first time counted her guests and found that there were only three instead of four.

She caught hold of Winnie as the other was bustling about.

"Where's that poor man you told me about? I thought perhaps he was sitting behind Honor in the drawing-room, but honestly I was so nervous while I was singing everything was a blur in front of me."

"What a fool idea for you to be nervous!" said

Winnie ; then she said : " Well, he is here ; Captain Rayburn took care of him."

Honor had come forward and had slipped her hand through Angela's arm.

" Rex put him in the smoking-room," she said.

" In Derry's room ? Oh ! we must go and fetch him."

" Rex will go with you, he can't walk alone. Angela ! " Honor drew her sister back. " Darling," she said, and despite all her efforts, tears would come. " We want you to be brave—we are afraid, Angela——"

" Afraid," repeated Angela in a low voice. She looked from her sister to her sister's husband, and then she looked into Winnie's kind, clear eyes, and it was Winnie who answered her.

" Yes, child, we're afraid. Because, you see, this poor chap—well, he's got a queer look of Derry about him, and we don't want you to be upset."

Angela stood like one transfixed ; and then she gave a little cry.

" You are trying to break it to me," she said. " It's Derry ! Derry himself. I know it—oh ! let me go to him. Rex, dear, please, *please* ! "

But Rayburn held her back.

" Listen, Angela dear," he said. " We do believe it is your husband, but—he is so changed. It is Derry in the flesh, but Derry without the spirit that made him so wonderful, and we want you to know the worst."

" Thank you," said Angela very gently, " it is very good of you all—but I don't care how changed he is. I don't care what he has become—if only he has been given back to me. Please, please, Rex, let me go to him by myself. I'm not going to do anything stupid, faint or scream or upset anybody. But—I want to go alone ; I must go alone."

At the door she just looked back with a faint smile.

" Please take care of my guests," she said, " and have some tea yourselves."

She closed the dining-room door and stood just an instant with her eyes closed, saying a little prayer to herself, and then she walked down the passage and pushed open the

door of the little room which had been sanctified to her by so many memories.

He was sitting just as Captain Rayburn had left him : evidently he could hear, for he turned his head as the door opened, but there was no change in his expression.

Angela shut the door and went towards him.

She stood and looked at him spellbound for awhile ; then she bent over him, she kissed him, she closed the poor staring eyes with her kisses, and she kissed his hair that had been cut so short.

He was dressed in the blue hospital clothes with which she was so familiar : they hung upon him loosely, his limbs were shrunken with suffering. She took the poor wasted hands in hers and pressed them to her heart, and all the time she was calling to him softly, tenderly.

" Derry, Derry my darling, don't you know me. You are home, you are with me. Derry, you have been given back to me ; I am Angela, your wife, your little wife. Oh ! won't you speak to me, Derry ? "

His answer was to draw his hands away from hers, to turn his face aside ; and the tears which she had kept back so bravely broke from her at this the surest sign that he was incapable of understanding a word she said.

It was a full hour or more before she joined the others in the drawing-room.

Winnie Wynstaye had never been in better form. She had sung, and danced, and cracked jokes, and the man who was with her had performed all his conjuring tricks, and was now being wildly applauded.

Honor was hovering outside that closed door, and Angela rested in the tender comfort of her arms for a moment.

Then she looked upward.

" It *is* Derry," she said brokenly. " He doesn't know me ; perhaps he will never know me again ; but I am not going to ask for anything more, Honor ! He has come back to me, he is alive, that is enough for me ! "

CHAPTER XXXIX

BUT in the weeks that followed, it became evident to Angela that despite all her courage she had spoken too quickly, too confidently, when she said that she wanted nothing more.

The craving to have him back in some semblance as he had been became a veritable auguish. After some little delay he had been removed from the hospital and sent to be with his wife in his home. It was so dreadful to Angela to see him sitting heavily, listlessly, where he was put or being led from place to place. A capable nurse had him in her charge, and she treated him as she would have treated a child. This was what raked Angela's heart, this daily vision of Derry, her wonderful, reckless, splendid Derry, reduced to this condition of helplessness.

Nothing seemed to make any impression on him.

When the story of his return was known many people came to see him, and he was studied by the first of the medical faculty; every one vied in a desire to help his wife.

Maud placed her house at her sister's disposal; Wycherley was open to them; Lady Bettina Storrington offered hospitality; but Angela could not bring herself to leave her own little home.

She clung to the idea that if speech and memory should ever be restored at any time, they would come to him in this place where they had been so happy together. She wanted him to awaken to full remembrance amid surroundings which were so dear to her.

Rex Rayburn was her greatest comfort in this dark time; a veritable brother.

He was unceasing in his efforts to discover something of the story which must be attached to this strange return.

It was so difficult to understand how Wynstaye had been found in the clothes he had been wearing; why his own identification disc had been missing; what had happened to him when his machine had crashed to earth.

Physically the man was creeping back to health and strength, and the use of his limbs was being gradually restored. The doctors who saw him assured Angela that in due course of time he would walk almost as well as he had done in the past. About his mental condition there did not seem to be so much optimism, but Angela was not greatly influenced by that. She relied on her own deductions, and allowing for the influence of her imagination and eager hopes, it did seem to her as the days went by and the New Year advanced that there was great improvement and that the shock was lifting a little.

Watching him ceaselessly, anticipating through her love all his spirit must be suffering and striving to attain, it seemed to her that he was beginning to get a little restless.

He would turn his head from side to side constantly and look about in a concentrated fashion, as if he were searching for some connexion in his mind, as if in a dim sort of way he realized he was in a place he knew well.

Sweeter even than these hopeful signs was the conviction that he was more content when she was near him.

The sympathy of all those who had known him was lavished on Wynstaye and his wife.

A number of flying men came to see him, among them Edward Storrington, home on short leave.

Angela scarcely knew whether she was glad or sorry that these men should see him. It was, of course, very touching that he should be so warmly remembered; and yet sometimes she used to find an added pathos in his expression after a visit of this kind; and with her swift intuitive sympathy she could divine how this remembrance hurt him. If in truth his spirit was beginning to pierce through the obscurity which had veiled it for so long, surely he must suffer in the knowledge of his present infirmity, in the recollection of what he had been.

The contrast must be so terrible to him!

Aviation has a spiritual note about it ; the man who flies is untrammelled ; he learns to breathe in great spaces. The actualities of his existence seem to be among the clouds. To chain such a man down, to deny him his freedom, to make of him a helpless speechless creature, was surely the cruellest of fates ? Angela never shared these sentiments with other people.

It was her bright and optimistic attitude which amazed all, except those who knew her very intimately.

In truth she had fulfilled her father's prophecy, and was showing herself possessed not only of courage, but of patience and strength.

The day the nurse left her patient was a great day for Angela.

Even her mother felt that she was taking too much on her shoulders ; but Angela's dominant feeling was one of unutterable gladness that now at last he had been given back to her, and she could do everything for him.

The story of his condition had, of course, reached Patricia Bosworth's ears, and had provoked a shiver.

It was so difficult for her to think of Derry as being the wreck he was said to be. Blessed with magnificent health herself, Patricia never pretended any real sympathy for those who suffered. Her visits to the sanatorium, where her husband still remained, were getting fewer and further between.

She was so tired of the war ! If there had been any place to which she could have gone, where the war would have been a secondary matter, Patricia would have fled to this place long ago. But where was such a haven to be found ?

When people spoke to her of Derrick Wynstaye and extolled the extraordinary devotion of his wife, Patricia's feelings were a mixture of resentment, jealousy, and curiously enough, satisfaction.

For in her arrogant way she was inclined to regard Wynstaye's misfortune as a punishment for his repudiation of herself. Nevertheless, it was bitter indeed to hear the world speak so well of his wife. Since although she

had no pity for him, yet she grudged Angela the right to stand beside him and protect him.

More than once Patricia had seen him being drawn through the park in a bath chair with Angela close beside him. She always avoided coming face to face with these two ; she dreaded to look on the man's changed face ; she hated to see Angela's fair loveliness.

Everything conspired to make life a dull dis-spiriting affair for Richard Bosworth's wife.

She had passed wholly out of Angela's thoughts in these days; it was only when Magna Chatfield came to see her or wrote to her, that the girl was reminded of the existence of one whom she was forced to regard as an enemy.

* * * * *

Angela had taken her invalid out into the Park for an hour one bright February day ; and she had just got him back into his customary place in the drawing-room when her mother arrived.

Mrs. Fayne never let a week pass without visiting her youngest child ; and the coming of her mother always brought to Angela, a sweetness and a delight which never faded and never could be put into words.

They spoke together a little while before going into the drawing-room.

" Yes, dariing, father is feeling very much better. He will be up to see you one day. I've brought you some eggs," Mrs. Fayne added. " Our own eggs, Angela ! Your father was so eager I should bring them for Derry. I hope to be able to let you have some every week."

" You dear thing ! " said Angela. She put the basket down on the table and stretched out her arms. " Mummie darling, you won't mind if I cuddle you, will you ? "

As she released her mother Angela looked at her lovingly.

" I wonder what there is about you that is so comforting ? And you always look such a lamb ! You know you are awfully smart to-day."

" Oh ! Angela my dear ! " deprecated Mrs. Fayne. " My old, old coat, and I know this hat is a disgrace. Your father is always worrying me to get a new one.

But I've grown so attached to this one I can't put it aside."

"It doesn't matter what you wear," Angela declared; "you always look smart and lovely! Yes, you do," she added defiantly; and then with a sigh she checked her nonsense. "Now you must go in and see Derry. I do believe, mummie dear, you will find him better. Alice Carter has been staying with us the last few days and she told me she saw a great difference in him. I am convinced that he was pleased to see her."

"Of course he's getting better, darling," Mrs. Fayne said with a good attempt at cheeriness. She never let Angela know what an ordeal it was to her to pay these visits to the young man who was so grotesquely like and unlike the Derry she had known.

It always cost her an effort to keep the tears back, and to wear a smile; and so her heart was beating just a little quickly as she followed Angela into the drawing-room now.

The room looked very bright and cheerful; flowers abounded (so many were sent to her that at times Angela had to dispose of them to the hospitals close at hand), and the early spring sunshine was pouring in through the window, gilding the walls and the pictures.

Derrick Wynstaye was sitting in an arm-chair near the fire; his eyes were closed and he looked asleep. Mrs. Fayne drew back not wishing to disturb him, but Angela reassured her and advanced.

"Mummie is here, Derry darling," she said. "She has brought you some farm produce. Won't you tell her how glad you are to see her?"

She always spoke to him in this way; she felt that though he could not answer, he understood; she wanted to train this understanding. For this reason she had cultivated the habit of reading to him every day; and every evening before he went to bed she would sing to him all his favourite songs.

As she stooped over him and kissed him he opened his eyes and looked into hers.

There was the most extraordinary expression, not only in his eyes, but written on his face.

It seemed as if he were passing through a moment fraught with the greatest trouble, as if he were pleading for help.

Angela's lips quivered and tears started to her eyes. The ray of the sun fell full upon her and caught the glory of her hair.

"What is it, darling?" she asked him in a low voice. "Are you in pain? Are you very tired? Tell Angela!"

He still continued to look into her eyes; and then a strange thing happened.

As she kissed him once again, she thrilled suddenly from head to foot, for he kissed her in return.

It was the first kiss he had given her since he had come back to her.

She turned away and covered her eyes with her hand for an instant, and then she spoke to her mother.

"Will you sit here, darling! I—I—I'll go to help Mason get some tea. I generally make the toast."

She was moving past him, and was half-way across the room, when a voice called to her. It was her husband's voice, and looking back, she saw that he was standing erect.

"Don't go," he said. "Angela—don't go!" She recoiled only for an instant, and then she almost screamed; it was her mother's white frightened face which checked that scream. Running with outstretched arms, she clung to him, burying her face on his breast; but almost immediately she recovered herself and remembered her duty.

"You—mustn't stand, darling. Oh! you mustn't strain your strength——"

But he did not heed her; he held her very, very closely; his face was working convulsively; then he looked into her mother's anxious, tender eyes.

"I've been dead—but now I'm alive. Oh! my God! how wonderful this is. It has been coming for days," he said, his words broke from him in stumbling fashion; "you've always been just out of my reach. Oh! the suffering! the awful longing to be able to speak! just to let you know."

She raised her head and then guided him back to the

chair, and as he sat down she sank on her knees beside it.

"Now, Derry, you must be calm," she said, trembling in every limb. "You must not be excited—must he, mummie? Tell him, mummie, he must be very careful —for my sake."

Mrs. Fayne put her hand on her child's bowed head, and then stooping over them both she kissed Angela's husband.

"Now *I* will go and make the toast!" she said. She smiled into Derrick's eyes and he smiled back.

The husband and wife were silent just for a little spell when they were alone, and then Wynstaye spoke.

"I am not going to get excited, and I'm not going to do anything that will throw me back," he said. His voice was still feeble, but it was distinct. "I'm only going to be happy a little while."

Angela laid her face on his hand, and then she kissed that white, thin hand.

"Get well, dearest!" she whispered.

"I *am* well," he answered. "Angela, I've been creeping towards you a little each day. Sometimes I have wanted to cry out to you--I have had dreadful moments struggling against the awful silence. But all that is over and done with! We are together again. Now it's our moment for love and happiness; afterwards I must try to remember——"

She put her hand on his lips.

"No—no—no! don't try. Don't do anything but get well. If you remember you may suffer, and you have had so much to bear. Oh! Derry, Derry, isn't God good to us? Shall we ever be able to let Him know how grateful we are?"

* * * * *

Late that night after Derrick had been put to bed and lay sleeping peacefully, Angela opened a letter which had come by the last post that evening. She felt wearied, but emotionally exalted. Her happiness was so great it frightened her. She experienced in this hour the strange truth that there is something more awful in happiness

than in sorrow ; for sorrow has an earthly finality about it ; whereas happiness, despite all its illuminating glory, is spiritual, elusive, and beyond it there lurks always the sinister figure of fear.

The letter she opened was from Magna Chatfield and announced in a few broken-hearted words the death of her brother.

The end had come suddenly ; much sooner than had been imagined possible.

The sister's letter was a piteous epistle ; it carried deep hurt to the girl who read it.

As she lay back in her chair with closed eyes, it struck Angela that she at this moment embodied the significance of life as it was lived in this time of war. Joy and heart-ache ran hand in hand. Derry had been given back to her. Richard Bosworth had passed away. They were typical of the curious *mélange* of emotions, dramatic episodes and the general upheaval which prevailed. She resolved she would not tell Derry this sad news. Love with Angela was based on the truest foundation.

Young as she was, she had been taught so many bitter lessons, that she had acquired a mental poise and a degree of unselfishness which was only equalled by her courage.

And after all, was not Angela just one of the thousands who had suffered as she had suffered, fought as she had fought against despair and distracted grief ? And drastic as the schooling has been, is not the world the better for all these hearts which have been so cleansed by pain and trial ?

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